

MURDER BY MOONLIGHT

Maxwell Grant

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CHAPTER I

LAMONT CRANSTON halted his roadster on the brow of the high hill and studied the distant view that lay etched in the brilliant moonlight. Beside him, Margo Lane smiled. She had been positive all along that Lamont would swing back through Hilldale instead of returning to New York.

An invitation to Gray Towers, the country home of Gordon Waycroft, was something that Cranston had sought for a long time, and having received one, he wasn't likely to pass it up at this late hour. For Waycroft, a gentleman who thrived on excitement and adventure, was the sort of person who interested Cranston, even though he might appear indifferent.

Scanning the distant landscape, Margo observed a curious structure on a far hill. It was a gabled building, squatly and ill-shaped, that looked like something snatched from the last century. It was near the top of a high slope, beyond an open, rolling lawn, and the building had the appearance of a sprawling beetle, dull brown in color, though, of course, the moonlight could account for that peculiar shade. Viewed from this hill, the sprawling manse was backed by encroaching trees that seemed like a monster ready to devour it.

The sight struck Margo as ominous, particularly when she noted the dimness of the windows, their glow so

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feeble that the moonlight drowned it. Aloud, Margo spoke the question that suddenly gripped her mind:

"Can that be Gray Towers?"

There was a slight, dry laugh from Cranston. Turning, Margo saw no smile on the straight lips of her usually impassive companion. Against the moonlight, Cranston's profile was strangely hawklike, adding to its cryptic expression.

"No, Margo," Cranston responded. "You are looking at Beaverwood, the sanitarium owned by Dr. Uther Marsh, as strange and as curious a man as the institution which he operates."

"You mean the place is an asylum?"

"Even that would be putting it mildly," returned Cranston. "Dr. Marsh is noted for one motto: 'All hope abandon, ye who enter here.' Other physicians, specialists in psychiatry, occasionally promise that their patients will recover. Dr. Marsh, never."

Margo shuddered and as she did, the sprawling building seemed to shimmer in the moonlight. The glow itself became eerie when Margo thought in terms of the occupants of Beaverwood, men whose lives were echoes of the past, whose futures were running out like sands of time with death as the only solace. Somehow, Cranston must have sensed Margo's macabre mood, for he spoke with a tone of reassurance

"Don't let it sink you, Margo." Cranston's tone was singularly calm. "They are happy at Beaverwood, so long as they comply with the rules imposed by Dr. Marsh. I have heard that he gives his patients free run of the grounds and is an expert at humoring their bizarre notions. Some even say that Marsh is a bit mad himself, and if so, his patients should surely find Beaverwood a haven."

A mad doctor with mad patients in a haven that was itself a mad creation! Having learned the true status of Beaverwood, Margo could read lunacy into every line of the crazy structure. The building began to grip her with a horrifying spell and she half expected it to loom from its slope and reach toward this hillside like a living monster. If ever there was a place where Margo never hoped to be, that place was Beaverwood.

"The full moon plays curious tricks," spoke Cranston, as though catching Margo's thought. "Forget Beaverwood and look across the gorge. You will see Gray Towers over there."

BEFORE she could inquire where the gorge was, Margo realized that it must be a jagged streak of blackness that cleaved the hill beyond Beaverwood. The gorge represented the course of Indian Creek, famed for its hundred foot waterfall, which was indicated by a film of mist arising from an angle in the blackened zigzag. But Margo's interest was taken by the sight beyond the cleft.

There stood Gray Towers, the home of Gordon Waycroft, imposing in its grandeur. Margo simply hadn't looked far enough the first time, or she would not have mistaken Beaverwood for its magnificent neighbor. Despite intervening trees and a half mile of added distance, Gray Towers was more of an eye-catcher. It looked like an Old World castle transposed to the American countryside and its gray walls gained a scintillation from the moonbeams. Nor was there any gloom about Gray Towers; its windows shone with sharply glistening lights, signifying that a party was in full progress. Just as Beaverwood had repelled Margo, so did Gray Towers offer the opposite effect. It was a thrill to be invited to such an alluring spot on a glorious night like this.

Others must have felt the same, for among the park-like trees that fronted Gray Towers could be seen the tiny lights of an automobile hastening up a curving driveway. Far below, through a long, narrow valley that

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wound around the double hill, were other lights that dipped and bobbed, then finally swung up among some trees that marked the entrance of Waycroft's estate.

Enthusiastically, Margo turned to Cranston:

"Let's go, Lamont!"

Deliberately, Cranston started the motor and began a trip down into the valley. It was a long way around by road, at least a quarter-hour ride at the present pace, and Margo was piqued because Cranston did not hurry. She thought he was giving her an unrequested lesson in patience, until he quietly explained the real reason.

"We've waited quite a while for an invitation to Waycroft's," Cranston reminded. "It wouldn't do to overstay our visit after we arrive."

"The sooner we get there, the sooner we can leave," argued Margo. "Have you thought of that?"

"I have." Cranston eased the car into gear as it approached a railroad crossing. "It's the wrong thing to do, Margo. Not to change the subject, has it ever struck you that Waycroft picks a most curious assortment of friends?"

Looking at Cranston, Margo nodded slowly.

"Therefore we should arrive late," concluded Cranston, emphatically. "If we are the last to get there, we can look over the whole crowd and form an opinion of them; an opinion which may have an important bearing on the future."

The car had passed the grade crossing and the lights of the Hilldale station were fading in the background. Cranston's comment had made a deep impression on Margo and with good reason. In his other self, Lamont Cranston was known as The Shadow, that mysterious master who hunted down men of crime. At gatherings such as Waycroft's party, where people from many walks of life hobnobbed, there was always the possibility that some adventurer with a criminal trend might be looking for human prey among the wealthy.

Perhaps The Shadow was already on such a trail!

THE thought thrilled Margo Lane. Leaning forward in her seat, she looked eagerly along the road ahead, brushing back the brunette hair that the wind swept across her face. Smiling at the girl's enthusiasm, Cranston gave the smooth-running roadster a trifle more speed, as he remarked:

"It isn't much farther, Margo. Just around the bend, down and across the covered bridge, and –"

The rest was drowned in a sharp screech of brakes. Turning the bend in question, Cranston had spied a barrier straight ahead. It was a detour sign planted squarely across the highway, its arrow pointing to a narrow side road that led up a steep slope to the right. Halting the car, Cranston opened the door on his side and stepped out. As he stooped to draw something from beneath the front seat, Margo made a protest.

"The road is closed," she said. "You can read the sign plainly, so why waste time? All we have to do is go the way the sign points."

"It happens to point to Beaverwood." As he spoke, Cranston was sliding his arms into a black cloak. "That makes it a dead end, Margo. Detour signs shouldn't point along roads that have no outlets. Remember, there is a deep gorge between Beaverwood and Gray Towers."

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"Then why the sign, Lamont?"

"That is something for us to learn." Cranston's voice had changed to a strange, sibilant whisper. "This road happens to be open, because, while we were watching from the summit, we saw another car go through here. So you're going through, Margo, and when you reach Waycroft's, you will extend my regret at being unable to accompany you."

"And if anyone asks me about this road –"

"Simply say that you came from the other direction. You will hear from me later, Margo, after I have looked into this riddle."

Placing a slouch hat on his head, Cranston moved forward into the gleam of the headlights. Shifting over behind the steering wheel, Margo was asking another question, when she suddenly realized that her companion was no longer at hand. Looking into the path of light, Margo gave a brief shudder.

Not that the girl was frightened at what she saw; it was merely that Margo always found herself startled by one of Cranston's quick changes of personality. Moving toward the detour sign was a cloaked figure that Margo knew must be Cranston, though it bore no resemblance to her friend.

Reaching the detour sign, The Shadow shifted it aside and beckoned. At the commanding gesture, Margo started the car forward and kept on going past where The Shadow stood. His arm had a forceful thrust that seemed to send the car along its route, even though darkness swallowed him completely the moment that the lights had passed. Glancing in the mirror, Margo hoped for a glimpse of The Shadow, but gained none. Blackness shrouded the spot where he had been; even the flicker of the moonlight was cut off by the massed trees at the bend.

All that Margo heard was the whisper of a parting laugh, so vague and evasive that it might have been inspired by her imagination and the murmur of the breeze!

THAT laugh was actual. Such whispered mirth was the token of The Shadow whenever he set forth upon a mysterious errand. That his present mission promised adventure, there could be no doubt. Long ago The Shadow had learned to gauge the symptoms of danger and they were present here. A detour sign, planted mysteriously within a dozen minutes after a car had gone along an unobstructed road was something quite out of the ordinary.

There was menace in that pointing arrow which guided unsuspecting strangers to the most forbidding of places, the sanitarium owned by Dr. Uther Marsh!

Already The Shadow was moving along that road, but not by car, as was to be expected. He was approaching on foot, silently, invisibly, his cloaked form eluding the filtered moonlight that trickled through the tree boughs above the private road. Swift was The Shadow's course for he was eager to reach his goal, whatever it might be, before another car came along to enter the trap which he had so carefully avoided.

It was at least a mile to Beaverwood by The Shadow's calculation and that distance would merely bring him to the entrance of the grounds, where great gates barred the way. That stopping point would mark the first place where trouble might be expected, hence it was only a question of minutes before The Shadow's mission might bring results. When crime threatened, the cloaked investigator preferred to be ahead of it and his softly whispered laugh indicated that he was gaining that desired end.

The Shadow's laugh came too soon.

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As he was jogging around a final bend that would bring the gates in sight, The Shadow heard the evidence announcing that crime had beaten him to the goal.

It literally ripped the silence of the moonlit night, that shriek of human anguish. A man's cry, pitched to a terrified falsetto that teemed with all the horror induced by the approach of sudden death. Midway, the scream choked off with a sob of fearful consummation, telling in more than words that crime had gained its way.

Murder by moonlight, fiendishly delivered, was ahead of The Shadow, master of the night!

CHAPTER II

THROB – throb – throb

The repeated sound, increasing as The Shadow neared it, was the muffled note of an idling motor. An afterpiece to tragedy, it had supplanted the dying screech that quivered through the night. A throbbing motor, at first unheard, was in itself full proof of the freakish circumstance that had nullified The Shadow's plans.

Some other car must have come along the highway while The Shadow was coasting down from the neighboring summit. The vehicle in question, coming later than the last car that rode along to Waycroft's, had reached the fork just after the detour sign had been placed. Falling for the bait, its driver had taken the side road up to Beaverwood, its lights unobserved by The Shadow, who at that time was deep in the valley.

How serious this freak tragedy had proven was something that The Shadow learned as he came in sight of the gates. There, in a clearing where the road widened, stood a light pickup truck, the vehicle with the idling motor. Ahead of it were the gates, the truck nosed partly between them, for the gates opened inward. Great gates, with sharp pointed spikes projecting upward, like those of the great picket fence that flanked away from the gateposts.

There was a reason why the gates were only partly open. They were latched in a very singular fashion, that kept their edges only a foot apart. The latch that held them was a human figure, horribly distorted. The body was dangling in air, for it had been lifted high and brought down forcibly upon the near spikes of the gate, where it hung impaled, the sharp prongs showing above.

As The Shadow reached the truck, he noted that it bore no name, though the dead man hanging from the spikes was probably its owner. Moving toward the gates, The Shadow was conscious of a sharp, repeated sound of something striking against metal. The sound was produced by drops of blood, falling from the mangled body and beating a slow tattoo upon the hood of the truck, just behind the radiator.

Even in the soft moonlight, the dead man formed a gruesome sight, but to The Shadow, who had observed murder in many hideous variations, this was simply a stimulus for immediate investigation. Death was death and the more outrageous the method, the more chance there was of gaining clues. In this case, The Shadow could immediately reconstruct important phases.

Very obviously, the truck driver had left his vehicle and started to open the gates, assuming that the false detour continued through them. There were footprints along the gravel to indicate this and the reason the truck had nosed farther was because the driveway was worn to a slight slope down to the gates themselves. The attack must have come while the victim was opening the gates, so The Shadow looked for evidence on the ground.

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There he saw a chunk of stone that belonged to one of the gateposts, near the top. Perched on that post, the attacker had caught the victim's attention and flung the stone directly at his head. It was during those horrifying moments when he could neither run nor dodge, that the truck driver had delivered the wild shriek for help that had terminated when the hurled stone reached his skull.

Looking to the opposite post. The Shadow saw that it also had a loose stone, lying on the top. This pointed to two attackers, one from either side, which fitted further with the evidence. There had been no chance for the victim to plead for life, not with two maniacs threatening him. The shriek was as logical as it was spontaneous and it had been prolonged by the fact that the killers had kept their prey in a trap, worrying him first from one side, then from the other.

They had forced their victim to seek an outlet between the gates and had therefore trained their aim upon that spot. The moment the man had tried to dash in that direction, all chance of escape was ended and his life with it. The first stone had found the victim's skull and the other, held in reserve, had proven unnecessary.

THE impaling of the victim was simply an afterthought, the mutual expression of two demoniac minds. The Shadow could picture the killers swinging down by the gates, picking up their victim and hoisting him up to the hood of the truck. Standing on the fenders they had given the body an acrobatic fling that pinned it on the gate spikes.

Swift work this, accomplished while The Shadow had been covering the last quarter mile, represented by the long bend in the uphill road. Though there had been ample time for the heinous work, it was obviously done in haste, for two reasons. First, the dripping blood, which did not come from the spike wounds, but from the victim's battered head, which was hanging toward the car, evidence of how his body had been flung, gripped on each side by hand and foot. Second, the killers had been able to get away before The Shadow reached the spot, which was further proof that they had not delayed their preconceived plan of handling the body.

The missing murderers couldn't have come through the clearing, or The Shadow would have heard them. Therefore they must have squeezed between the gates, which allowed just sufficient space. It was dark beyond the gates, like a narrow tunnel, but beyond was a spread of moonlight, marking the open ground surrounding Beaverwood. Unless the murderers had fled up to the sanitarium, they would be edging along the trees near the fence, which meant that The Shadow would still have opportunity to stalk them.

Drawing an automatic, The Shadow worked between the gates, taking care not to clang them. The dead form above him quivered grotesquely, but its motion did not symbolize life. The Shadow had simply jarred one gate with his passing shoulder.

A tiny flashlight glimmered on the gravel; guarded in the folds of The Shadow's cloak, the narrowed beam flitted hither and thither, picking up footprints leading to the lawn, close by the shelter of the trees at the left. Scuffed footprints, as though lazy men had kicked the gravel; these could be the tracks of shamblers, who committed murder merely for pleasure. Looking up the slope past bushy trees that dotted the rough lawn, The Shadow saw the dim lights of Beaverwood and wondered how many of its occupants might prove to be homicidal maniacs. Perhaps the best plan would be to move up toward Beaverwood and cut off the return of any residents who might still be at large.

Debating the two choices, The Shadow found a compromise. Starting toward the sanitarium, he was prepared to change course with a long veer over to the left that would bring him to the skirting trees. Thus in cutting off the fugitives he would be gaining on them at the same time, as effectively as if he followed their actual trail. Such at least was The Shadow's preliminary plan, until new circumstances ended it.

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There was a snarl from the dark gray driveway that continued up to Beaverwood. Wheeling, The Shadow saw a creature that materialized in a fashion as surprising as his own. Just as The Shadow could loom suddenly from blackness, so was this attacker bounding from the dark gray background that represented its own color. The creature was a mighty hound, its wide fangs showing sharply in the moonlight.

THE huge dog's sharp eyes spotted The Shadow, only to lose him as he faded toward the gates. Baying furiously, the beast turned for another spring; launching full force, it came up suddenly with a clang. The Shadow had given those gates a sudden shift, widening one at the expense of the other; passing through, he had let the hound meet the near gate full force, jamming it shut and bouncing the other part way open, for in these actions of the gates, the distorted body on the spike tops was serving as a mechanical lever.

Dodging around the truck, The Shadow saw the body gyrate and nearly tumble, while the gates creaked furiously on rusty hinges. It wasn't the hound that was coming through; instead, a bulky man with a shotgun lunged out of darkness, in quest of The Shadow. Looking back, The Shadow saw a broad, pasty face, leering in the moonlight. Mere sight of those ugly, pock-marked features gave the impression that their owner would not stop at murder, if occasion demanded.

As he came, the ugly man gave a guttural cry that brought the great hound to his heels. Deftly, The Shadow slipped back through the gates and halted momentarily as he saw flashlights glitter from the lawn. Then came a voice, sharp, but with a trace of dignity:

"Dortha! Have you found someone?"

The ugly man supplied a unique answer. Instead of dashing around the truck, he sprang into it and pressed the light switch. The brilliant glow cut through the bars of the gate, illuminating the black hole beyond. There, between Dortha and a group of men who were headed by Dr. Marsh, stood The Shadow, fully outlined in the glare!

The Shadow's plans had gone into complete reverse. His search for murderers had led to his own discovery. Circumstantial evidence was against him, for The Shadow stood armed, a trespasser on the Beaverwood property, and above him, grinning in macabre glee, was the tilted corpse impaled upon the gate spikes, flinging down a silent accusation.

Rightly or wrongly, Marsh and his men were ready to throw the burden of crime upon this unwanted visitor who had uncovered murder. There was a shout, in the doctor's commanding tone, ordering his followers to fire at the stranger within their gates. As the call came, The Shadow knew that he was trapped. Only chance could relieve him from this dilemma.

Chance did.

Always, The Shadow was quick to take advantage of unexpected opportunity and the man who provided the needed ingredient was Dortha. In response to the shout from Dr. Marsh, the pock-faced plug-ugly decided to beat the guns of Marsh's retainers. Dortha wanted credit in this case, hence was overeager in his action. He had a weapon better than a shotgun, the truck that had brought a murder victim to these premises.

Snapping the truck into gear, Dortha hurled it through the gates. As it whipped the barriers wide, the truck dislodged the hanging body, which performed a lifelike somersault, struck the top of the truck and tumbled into the rear, where it disappeared from sight. Against the moonlight beaming through the gates, that spectacle was startling. Seemingly the dead figure had revived itself for the sudden plunge.

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ALL eyes were riveted upon the phenomenon, except Dortha's. He was trying to keep The Shadow in the glare of the headlights, but already the cloaked invader had wheeled away. Off into the fringing darkness, he was gone from the range of the lights so suddenly that when others looked for him, they blinked at his surprising disappearance. Angrily, Dortha backed the truck out through the gates, turning it so that the lights would follow the line of trees; then, seized by another impulse, he wheeled the vehicle about to drive down the road to the valley.

Not until then did Dortha remember the huge hound that had climbed into the seat beside him. In guttural tones, Dortha sent the great dog to the chase. It bounded to the ground, loped through the gates, and went snarling among the trees, drawing Marsh and the other men after it. They were leaving the truck to Dortha; their quarry was The Shadow, but to find him was difficult, considering the start that he had gained.

Flashlights spread in a semicircle, guided by the big dog's snarls. These searchers were following The Shadow's own technique, but instead of a lone hand hunting for two or more fugitives, there were several and they had only one man to find. Even without Dortha, they formed a formidable group, for all were armed with shotguns which were ideal for close-range fire.

Saplings crackled as the big hound scrambled through, picking up the scent. There were moments when the spreading men fancied they saw a fleeting figure following the curve of the lawn, and called the hound to the new trail. After it had covered a wide area in a surprisingly short period, the hunt narrowed, far to the left of Beaverwood.

There, the baying of the hound was muffled by the tumult of a great waterfall. The dog was keeping to one spot, sure proof that it had trapped the fugitive. Flashlights converged into the clustered trees, gun muzzles poked into the glare, while sharp voices called upon the fugitive to surrender. There was no answer from The Shadow.

Skeptical men turned their flashlights upon the trees, thinking that their prey had climbed there, but the boughs were devoid of any blackened mass. Besides, the hound was not baying at the trees; he was at the brink of the waterfall, whining as he looked into the stream. Into the moonlight stepped Dr. Marsh, a bearded man with a sharp and cunning eye.

Above the falls, Indian River formed a swift, deep current that would have swept the stoutest swimmer with it. Below the brink, the cataract roared straight downward, shattering itself into mist upon the rocks below. The brink itself was fifty feet across and formed the most menacing feature of all. There the water swirled with the fury of a maelstrom among jagged, treacherous rocks, some of which were scarcely out of water, while others were so precariously balanced that a mere touch might have sent them down into the gorge.

The bearded lips of Dr. Uther Marsh formed a straight, set line, as his keen eyes summed up the details of that scene. Confident that even a man of superhuman prowess couldn't have dared that crossing and survived, Marsh snapped his fingers to call off the dog and turned to wave his followers back toward the sanitarium.

Whatever his personal sentiments in the case, Dr. Marsh was sure that he had seen the last of an overbold adventurer who styled himself The Shadow!

CHAPTER III

WHILE The Shadow was nearing the finish of his brief but rapid adventure, Margo Lane arrived at Gray Towers. She'd driven carefully all the way, for despite Cranston's assurance to the contrary, Margo believed in detour signs. Indeed, she was very much surprised when she crossed the covered bridge below Indian Gorge and found its timbers sound; similarly, she was greatly pleased when she wheeled the car into the long

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driveway leading up to Waycroft's mansion. As she reached the house itself, Margo gave a grateful sigh that ended when she thought of Cranston.

Seized with the realization that Lamont was right, Margo recognized that he had chosen the path of danger, if any menace lurked. Then her confidence in Cranston's other self, The Shadow, caused the girl to smile at her own qualms.

Waycroft's front door was wide open and the numerous guests were hearty in their welcome. Among them, Margo recognized faces that she knew, for many of Waycroft's friends were from New York cafe society, which rated Margo as a member. Nevertheless, those gay personalities added an ominous note to the occasion.

There was a reason why Margo Lane preferred cafe society. In that smart set that considered itself smarter, many things could happen. Anything from petty jealousies to actual intrigue had been known to touch off serious crimes, and always there were leeches surrounding the wealthy patrons of New York's night clubs. Swindles, robberies, outright murders were a constant threat and it was Margo's business to watch for their symptoms while she played the part of an attractive sophisticate.

Knowing that mystery was in the offing, Margo did not particularly welcome the familiar faces until she happened to see Waycroft. The owner of Gray Towers was the essence of conviviality and his greeting was so heartfelt that Margo's worries lulled. For Gordon Waycroft was a man of intuition, the sort who could note any symptoms of brewing trouble. His mood was so lighthearted that it proved contagious. Somehow, Margo felt that if there was menace in the neighborhood of Gray Towers, Waycroft would certainly have sensed it.

He was a handsome man, Gordon Waycroft. There was youth in his manner, despite the gray hair that he made no effort to minimize by a short-clipped haircut. Rather, Waycroft seemed proud of the bushy locks that he stroked back with his fingers after giving Margo a polite bow. As proof of his intuition, a twinkle arrived in his gray eyes, as he looked beyond Margo to the doorway that she had entered.

"Good evening, Miss Lane," said Waycroft, a touch of whimsy in his tone. "I trust this does not mark the ending of a beautiful friendship."

"Why, no," said Margo. "I can't see what would make you think that I –" She caught herself suddenly when she saw Waycroft smile. "Oh, now I understand. You're wondering where Lamont is."

"Precisely," acknowledged Waycroft. "You are arriving late and by yourself, two things that mark a member of the lonely hearts' club. I sincerely hope that you and Cranston haven't agreed to disagree. You used to get along so well together."

"We still do," insisted Margo, "whenever we manage to get together, but lately Lamont has preferred another companion."

"A blonde?" asked Waycroft, blandly.

"That would hardly describe the police commissioner," laughed Margo. "In an off moment, he fancied that Lamont was something of a criminologist. As a result, he's pestered Lamont ever since. Every time my heavy date goes around to the Cobalt Club, the commissioner commandeers him for special duty."

WAYCROFT'S face went serious. He was handsome when he smiled, but even more so when his mood became solemn. Then, his beaming face lost its upturned wrinkles and gained a rugged expression that befitted his strong, square jaw. It gave him age, that look, because it bespoke experience. As she noted the

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change, Margo felt that Waycroft had grown twenty years older in the space of several seconds, until she realized that his jolly mood had created a false illusion of youth.

"I'm sorry Cranston did not come tonight," declared Waycroft, abruptly. "Whatever his talents at crime detection, we could use them here. Perhaps I should have mentioned it when I invited him."

Margo threw a worried glance toward some of the chattering guests who thronged the reception hall. Briefly, Waycroft's smile returned, but in a grim style that gave no hint of jollity. He was relaxing just enough to ease Margo's apprehensions.

"Nothing is wrong here at Gray Towers," declared Waycroft, "but there have been some current rumors covering the general vicinity. If I had thought for a moment that you were coming here alone, I would have advised you to come by train."

"But why?" queried Margo, innocently. "It was a lovely drive by moonlight."

"There's not much light along the valley road," returned Waycroft, "and that's where all the rumors seem to gather. People have seen skulking figures; glowing eyes peering from bushes. Some even say that they have heard the echoes of crazy laughter, while they were driving through the covered bridge."

Margo gave a puzzled stare as she asked:

"What covered bridge?"

"So you came the other way!" exclaimed Waycroft. There was relief in his tone as he added in a lower voice: "I would advise you to drive back by the same route. It may be dangerous along the valley road."

There was one technique that Margo had learned from Cranston and had used to frequent advantage. That technique was to cover a bluff with a reversal. Anyone could pretend to know nothing, but the policy could be carried too far. It was better to cover it with a glimmer of understanding and Margo had practiced the trick to perfection.

"The valley road," mused Margo, half aloud. "You must mean the one that goes past Beaverwood."

There was a quick nod from Waycroft.

"You've heard of Beaverwood?"

"Of course," replied Margo. "They say it's a very special sort of sanitarium. I should know the names of some of the people who have gone there."

"I could tell you several," returned Waycroft, grimly. "Some of their friends and relatives are here tonight, holding a conference in my study." He gestured across the reception hall, to the far wing of the house. "In fact, they came to learn how much truth was behind the local rumors. Too bad that Cranston isn't here to help them analyze the case. But suppose we let them handle their own troubles, while we go out to the garden."

LEADING the way through the reception hall, Waycroft beckoned to the other guests and the group went through a rear doorway to a path that led to the Italian garden. The path itself was quaint for it was composed of flat stones sunk in the turf and even by moonlight those small slabs gave indications of varied colors. What attracted Margo most were stones of mica formation that shone beautifully under the moon's glitter. As she paused to admire them, the rest of the group walked ahead with Waycroft, and when Margo hurried after

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them, she found herself playing hopscotch on the glittering stones. Overtaking the rest, Margo dropped her child's play and became serious as they reached the marble benches and whitened, vine-strewn pillars of the garden.

Being serious brought back memories of Waycroft's recent apprehensions, which in turn made Margo think of Cranston's venture. With a slight shiver, Margo looked in the direction of Beaverwood, but could see no traces of the sprawling building that lay across the impassable gorge. The trees along the upper stretch of Indian River formed a blackened mass that cut off further view, and to Margo the blotting barrier assumed the proportions of a great sleeping dragon that might at any moment writhe its coils toward Gray Towers.

As she tried to shake that fancy, Margo heard something that disturbed her. It was the slight crackle of brush among the trees behind the garden's vines, a sound that might mean prowlers. Listening intently, Margo failed to hear the sound again, and when the vines rustled audibly under a sweeping breeze, she laughed at her own fears. Relaxing, Margo listened to the conversation of the group around her and decided that nothing could be calmer than this garden behind Gray Towers.

Then came the thing that broke the calm.

There was a sudden clatter of an opening door in the far wing of the Towers. Out sprang an excited man who was stocky and short-built, followed by three others. They were coming from Waycroft's study, which was indicated by lighted windows with lowered shades. The stocky man was shouting something incoherent in a high-pitched voice.

Springing to his feet, Waycroft recognized the foremost member of the group and shouted back:

"What is it, Brenshaw?"

Margo knew the man as soon as Waycroft named him. Kirk Brenshaw was a wealthy New Yorker occasionally seen around the night clubs when the demands of big business relaxed their pressure. Usually Kirk was placid and friendly, the sort who was pleased when acquaintances called him by his first name. At present, however, he was so excited that Margo wondered if he knew his name at all.

"It's the sheriff!" Kirk exclaimed. "He just phoned to warn us that something has happened on the valley road."

"Take it easy, Kirk," suggested Waycroft. "How serious was the occurrence?"

"The sheriff doesn't know," panted Kirk, as he reached the group. "Somebody phoned him that they ran into a detour sign that didn't belong there. He thinks maybe the bridge went out."

TURNING to the group, Waycroft asked promptly whose car was handiest. Having arrived last, Margo decided that hers probably fitted that definition. Gripping the girl by the arm, Waycroft told her to come with him, at the same time ordering the others to follow in other cars. As they hurried through the reception hall, Waycroft said for Margo to go ahead and have her keys ready, while he armed himself against any trouble.

In the car, Margo was getting the motor started when Waycroft arrived with an old-fashioned muzzle loading pistol. He remarked that he hadn't the wherewithal to load the antique, but that it would do as a cudgel if needed. Then they were spinning down the long driveway and swinging into the valley road, where Margo was giving the car real speed, when Waycroft gripped her arm warningly.

"The covered bridge is just ahead!" he exclaimed. "Watch out; something may be wrong there!"

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It was too late for Margo to halt the car, even if she hadn't known that the bridge was all right. She was slackening speed, however, as they went through the ancient structure, where the roar of the motor brought uncanny echoes from the rafters above. Then, as they swung up toward the Beaverwood side road, Margo saw approaching headlights, but before she could apply the brakes, they veered. The car from the other direction was heading for Beaverwood, so Waycroft told Margo to do the same.

Close behind the other car, Margo covered the distance at a speed The Shadow would have envied. When they reached the space before the gates, the other car pulled over and Margo came to a halt at its left. A man was climbing from the other car, the moonlight glistening from a badge that adorned his coat lapel. Recognizing him as the sheriff, Waycroft gave a wave of greeting.

Straight ahead stood the gates of Beaverwood, tightly closed. Except for the throbbing motors, not a sound disturbed the serenity of the setting. The spot that had been a threshold to tragedy bore no visible marks of the recent crime that had occurred there.

Yet to Margo Lane, something was wrong about the scene. It couldn't be that nothing had happened here, considering that those gates were the only real blockade along The Shadow's trail. If only Margo could hear a whispered laugh, just sufficient for her ears alone, to prove that her cloaked friend was still at large!

No whisper came. Amid the silence, Margo felt a pang of fear that this serenity might symbolize the finish of The Shadow's final adventure!

CHAPTER IV

OTHER cars were coming up the road, to crowd into the wide space by the gates. The first man to alight was Kirk Brenshaw, whose nervous manner represented that of others who accompanied him. Yet there was firmness in Kirk's broad features as they showed in the moonlight. His face, though heavily jowled, was strong of jaw, while his eyes, narrowed under bristly brows that made a contrast to his baldish head, were sharp in their determination.

"Whatever has happened here, sheriff," declared Kirk Brenshaw, "you must get to the bottom of it. Things have gone on long enough, or should I say too long?"

The sheriff rested his jaw on a cud of tobacco and surveyed Kirk with a speculative gaze. He was a typical country sheriff, this fellow, but he seemed to know the ways of city folk. After meeting Kirk's stare for several seconds, the sheriff resumed his chew and turned to Waycroft.

"Who's he?" The sheriff thumbed toward Kirk. "And what makes him so important?"

"He's Kirk Brenshaw," explained Waycroft. "He has a cousin in the sanitarium. When he heard there was trouble over this way, he was worried."

The sheriff gave a grunt. Looking past Kirk, he noted other faces in the stocky man's car.

"What about them?" queried the sheriff. "Have they got kinfolk in this nut-hatchery, too?"

"They have," replied Waycroft. "That's why they came out here. They were in my study, discussing the rumors that they've heard, when your call came through."

"And frankly, sheriff," put in Kirk, promptly, "we fear that Dr. Marsh is giving his patients too much freedom. I, for one, would feel personally involved if my cousin Hubert should get loose during one of his

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homicidal moods."

The sheriff turned and studied the big gates.

"Looks like nobody was loose," he argued. "Besides, nothing happened up here. The detour sign was planted down on the highway, according to the call I got. Only there wasn't any sign when I came along and no truck, neither."

"No truck?" queried Waycroft. "What truck?"

"The fellow that called up said there was a truck took this road," replied the sheriff. "Naturally it would, because this was the only way the arrow could have pointed. The man who phoned me turned back and called from the station. He said he knew this road was blind and I guess the trucker found it out for himself and turned back."

"Unless he went through the gates," remarked Waycroft. "In that case he may be in trouble. Dr. Marsh isn't in the habit of welcoming strangers, so I've heard."

"You heard right," agreed the sheriff. "Maybe we'd better go up and see Doc Marsh. Open the gates, somebody, while I get into this rumble seat "

The sheriff meant the rumble seat of Margo's roadster and the fact that he was using it signified that he expected Waycroft to ride in front with Margo. They had hardly taken their places before another man clambered into the rumble seat uninvited, though the sheriff grudgingly made room for him. The last member of the party was Kirk Brenshaw.

DRIVING up to Beaverwood, Margo had trouble finding the entrance to the sprawling building. The sheriff finally told her where to stop and at close range Margo found the place even uglier than she had imagined. Remembering Marsh's motto of no hope for those who reached his jurisdiction, Margo wondered if Cranston had come under the baleful control that he had personally mentioned. All the lights in Beaverwood were out, a fact which added to the ominous appearance of the bulky structure. To Margo, any of the barred windows might mean a prison where The Shadow could be lying helpless, if still alive.

Before the sheriff could disengage himself from the deep rumble seat, a heavy door opened in the wall of Beaverwood. Into sight stepped Dr. Uther Marsh, holding a lantern in one hand, and carrying a heavy cane in the other. Behind him, in the dimly lit background of the doorway, were three servants armed with shotguns. Two were stocky and rather sizable, but the third was a comparatively slender man of wiry appearance.

It was this third who followed Dr. Marsh to the roadster and Margo noted that the fellow wore a chauffeur's cap. Hearing the crunch of gravel behind him, Marsh looked around, saw the chauffeur, and said in a dry tone:

"Very well, Cripp, you may accompany me."

Margo didn't know whether to shudder or laugh. In a sense, this setting was a nightmare, with Marsh the principal actor. There was a glare in the eyes that peered from the man's bearded face; a merciless expression upon his straight, challenging lips. As for Cripp, the doctor's toady, he looked like a lesser demon traveling in the wake of a satanic master. Sallow of face, quick and furtive of eye, Cripp seemed to be looking for trouble and hoping he would find it.

Offsetting this menacing aspect was the whimsical phase of the situation.

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In the moonlight, the lantern was unnecessary, hence Marsh appeared to be putting on an act. He made Margo think of old Diogenes, the Greek philosopher who carried a lantern in daylight, saying he was searching for an honest man. From the way he held the lantern toward the faces of Gordon Waycroft and Kirk Brenshaw, the doctor might be remembering the Diogenes legend, too. Yet Margo, despite herself, was shrinking behind the wheel, glad that she for one was escaping Marsh's glare-eyed scrutiny.

"Ah, my neighbor Waycroft," spoke Marsh, with a slight sneer. "It was kind of you to bring Kirk Brenshaw here. I suppose he would like to see his cousin, Hubert, but I must remind you both that these are not visiting hours. Under no circumstances can my patients be disturbed."

Annoyed by the way Marsh ignored him, the sheriff thrust himself into the conversation.

"We're here on another matter," snapped the sheriff. "A truck came up this road a short while ago. What happened to it?"

Dr. Marsh turned and circled the lantern in the moonlight as though looking for the missing truck. Then, with a shrug he handed the lantern to Cripp and gave a long gesture in the direction of the gates.

"When people take the wrong road," declared Marsh, "they usually turn back when they reach those gates. We would know if anyone came through them. No truck drove up to Beaverwood this evening."

THERE was a ring of truth in Marsh's tone that impressed Margo oddly. She felt that the bearded man was delivering fact, but with some reservation. Margo doubted that her companions caught the same significance, but they, of course, knew nothing of The Shadow's mission in this neighborhood.

"If a truck had come here," added Marsh, sharply, "I would have told its driver to leave. Therefore, unless you have specific objections, I am giving you the same advice."

Taking the hint, Waycroft gestured for Margo to start the car. From the rumble seat, Kirk Brenshaw took a look past Marsh and Cripp to the two men who stood in the doorway. Quickly, Kirk demanded:

"Where is that big servant of yours doctor? The one named Dortha who is usually on duty?"

A hesitant flicker showed in Marsh's eyes. It was Cripp who spoke while his master fumbled for an answer.

"Dortha is out exercising the dog," said Cripp. "We keep big Bosco tied up in the daytime."

"I'm glad to hear it," snapped the sheriff. "We've had complaints about that hound. We want no more of them. Good night."

Driving back to the gates, Margo stopped to let out passengers. Conferring with Kirk Brenshaw, the sheriff decided to have a further look around there and then walk down to the fork, searching for the mysterious detour sign on the way. When Waycroft decided that he ought to join the hunt, Margo said she would drive him to the fork and then start back to New York.

They rode to the fork in silence and found some of the sheriff's men already there. As he said good night, Waycroft's face became troubled.

"I shouldn't let you drive alone, Miss Lane," he began. "There's something mysterious afoot, so strange that it may be dangerous. It may not be safe in this neighborhood –"

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"But I'm not staying here," put in Margo. "In no time I'll be across the covered bridge, past your place and on my way to town. So don't worry, Mr. Waycroft."

It was Margo who was really worried. Her actions showed it the moment she had dipped around the sloping bend toward the covered bridge. She was worried about Cranston, hoping anew that he had met with no disaster while disguised as The Shadow. Handling the car at a snail's pace, Margo kept blinking the lights, on the chance that her friend, if anywhere about, would recognize the signal.

Close to the covered bridge, Margo stopped. Black as a tunnel, with rafters under its peaked roof, the old bridge was the most ominous spot along the highway. If any of Marsh's insane patients were at large, that bridge might be their lurking spot. The thought chilled Margo as she stared through the white moonlight at the black bulk of the bridge. A moment later, she saw something that intrigued her.

Down to the right stretched a grass-covered road that amounted to little more than wheel tracks. It led into the river, which was broad at this spot, and therefore shallow. On the far side of the lazy stream were other ruts, leading up the opposite bank, proving that this was an old ford through which a car could easily navigate. Anxious to avoid a trip through the bridge, Margo turned the roadster down into the ruts and worked it through water that came only to the wheel hubs.

The car dipped a trifle as it reached the far bank. On the right was a stony ledge, that poked its rocky mass through thick but scrubby bushes. Margo didn't want to plow through deep water that might spray through the radiator and stall the motor, nor was she anxious to sideswipe the ledge. So she stopped to take a look at the buttress of the bridge, rising to the left. Next, she intended to look for the wheel ruts, dead ahead, and guide by them if possible.

Margo never did complete that calculation.

FROM the bushy ledge to the right came a vicious snarl, the tone of some great beast, accompanied by a guttural shout that was human only by comparison. As she turned, Margo saw a great hound launch in a terrific spring, straight for the car; looming behind the savage beast, as though propelling the creature, was a man whose posture gave him the semblance of a gorilla.

It was Bosco, the mighty hound, unleashed by Dortha, the huge servant whose absence Dr. Marsh had been loath to discuss!

Wide-mouthed, the beast was flinging its great paws forward as though to guide its deadly fangs to the throat it saw below. Instinctively, Margo flattened to the seat on the right, though she realized her act would merely delay the brute's murderous thrust for a few useless seconds. Time didn't seem to count in this horrible situation, but it was more vital than Margo knew.

Coincident with Bosco's lunge, a blot of living blackness pitched itself from a spot that Margo couldn't see, the sidewall of the bridge that loomed to the left. As Bosco landed in the driver's seat from which Margo had so deftly ducked, the blackened mass completed its jump, before the hound could turn.

Snarls mingled with a fierce, unearthly laugh as the great dog tried to tangle with a human fighter cloaked in black. How they fared was revealed by the sounds that followed. The dog's snarls ended with a choky whine while the laugh took on a tone of triumph. Then, propelled by iron hands that gripped its furry throat, the dog was flung headlong over the rumble seat to land with a smacking splash in the direction of midstream.

Twisting full about, The Shadow whipped an automatic from beneath his cloak, all in one revolving action, and jabbed a shot above Margo's head. As the bullet ricocheted from the bushy ledge, Dortha dodged while

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leveling his shotgun. Pulling the trigger while off balance, Dortha aimed so high that his slugs clipped the eaves from the covered bridge. The kick of the shotgun did the rest, saving The Shadow the trouble of further fire.

To the tune of The Shadow's sardonic laugh, Dortha spilled from the ledge and landed in the stream with a heartier splash than Bosco's. Without waiting for either to resume the fray, The Shadow gripped the wheel and whipped the roadster into gear. With a whine, the car lurched up through the wheel ruts, reached the highway and sped away taking the route past Waycroft's.

Dazed by the speed with which the whole adventure had begun and ended, Margo Lane could scarcely realize that she'd been rescued by the friend whom she had given up for dead or captured, The Shadow!

Had she known of the earlier experiences that he had undergone, Margo would have marveled even more at The Shadow's return. She was to learn such details later, when The Shadow himself revealed them!

CHAPTER V

IT was mid afternoon in the town of Courtland, a dozen miles south of Hilldale. A coroner's jury was gathered outside a garage, inspecting a tow job that had been brought in the night before. The tow job consisted of a small truck, so thoroughly demolished that its next stopping place would be the junkyard.

The truck had belonged to a man named Judd who was a stranger here. Why he had taken the Courtland road was unexplained, since Judd was dead, which was the least surprising part of the story. The Courtland road was noted for a very dangerous slope called "Dead Man's Hill" and going down that grade, Judd had let the truck get out of control.

What had happened to the truck gave a general idea of Judd's own fate. Not being constructed of steel and other metals, he had been demolished and was at present lying in the local morgue as another exhibit for the coroner's jury to view.

Such tragedies always attracted the curious. The crowd around the garage was too busy watching the jury's reactions to pay any attention to persons in its midst. Hence no one noticed Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane as they walked back to the main street where they had parked the roadster. Once in the car, they began to discuss the tragedy.

"It's the same truck," declared Cranston. "The one that Dortha drove away from Beaverwood."

"Then Judd must be the murdered man!" exclaimed Margo. "What a horrible thing it was, to impale him on those gates! Only maniacs would think of anything so awful!"

"I am quite sure Dr. Marsh shares that opinion," observed Cranston. "He is probably still commending Dortha on his efficient removal of the evidence."

"But if madmen were loose – like Hubert Brenshaw, Kirk's cousin –"

"It would hardly be good policy for Dr. Marsh to admit it, Margo. He is responsible for the patients in his care and he has a heavy investment in that sanitarium. Accidents are apt to happen in such places and when they do, news of them is often suppressed."

A sudden indignation swept over Margo. It didn't seem right that Cranston should be defending such practices, considering that, as The Shadow, he stood as a champion of justice. As she reflected, however,

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Margo remembered that Cranston had a personal interest in last night's affairs, inasmuch as he had nearly become another victim, during the chase at Beaverwood. How he had finally eluded Marsh's men was something that Cranston had not yet divulged.

Picking up the trend of Margo's thoughts, Cranston quietly spoke his further opinions of the case and Margo, listening intently, realized that she was hearing a crime analysis in the style that surely befitted The Shadow.

Cranston took it first from a viewpoint that favored Dr. Uther Marsh.

ASSUMING that Hubert Brenshaw and some of his fellow patients had slipped in and out without Marsh's knowledge, a thing not implausible considering the cunning of certain insane brains, the episode at the Beaverwood gate stood partly justified. There, Dortha had encountered a stranger in the person of The Shadow and could have taken him to be a murderer. Once the chase was on, Dortha's removal of the incriminating truck was understandable, since it would be evidence against Marsh's patients if the doctor's servants failed to capture the cloaked stranger within their gates.

On the other hand it was conceivable that Marsh knew some patients were loose and was already searching for them. Finding murder done and a stranger handy, Marsh could have decided to pin crime on the intruder, if only to give his patients the benefit of doubt. Marsh's subsequent statements, implying that nothing had happened around Beaverwood, could have been inspired by the fact that The Shadow was still at large.

"In either case," concluded Cranston, "the fact that Dortha took the truck to Dead Man's Hill was logical enough. It means that the sheriff will never connect it with Beaverwood unless Dr. Marsh decides to tell the truth."

Margo gave a doubtful smile.

"You can't fool people all the time," she said. "Even that dumb sheriff may guess that Dortha simply drove the truck down here, or at least along the Courtland road."

Unfolding a road map, Cranston passed it to the girl.

"Look it over, Margo," he suggested, "and tell me if you would guess it, if you didn't already know."

As Margo studied the map, her forehead wrinkled. She was confronted with something that was indeed a mystery. It had been clever of Dortha to send a dead man down a hill in a skidding truck that was to mangle the man's body thoroughly enough to ruin evidence of earlier murder, but such ingenuity paled to insignificance, when compared with another question; namely, how Dortha had brought the truck to Dead Man's Hill.

This terrain was a series of ridges and valleys, where most of the roads ran parallel and did not cross. There was no link at all between the Hilldale road that ran past Beaverwood and Gray Towers, that could connect it with the Courtland road a few miles to the south. To get from one to the other would have meant a thirty-mile journey through well populated towns.

Smiling at Margo's puzzlement, Cranston calmly added to the enigma, by showing her a paragraph in the morning newspaper. According to that item, the sheriff had questioned the drivers of all cars arriving at the fork below Beaverwood. None had seen any trucks along the valley road, which ran a considerable length without a turn-off.

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"Consider that time element," added Cranston. "The last persons who came along the valley road were two friends of Waycroft's who arrived in a coupe. Both were friends of Kirk Brenshaw, too, because they have relatives who are patients at Beaverwood. It was after their car passed that the detour sign was planted and when they reached Gray Tower, they joined Kirk in Waycroft's study."

Margo nodded. That part tabbed.

"Judd's truck was next," resumed Cranston. "It took the road up to Beaverwood. We came along immediately afterward. About the time I reached the Beaverwood gates, on foot, you must have been pulling into Gray Towers."

"That's about right," agreed Margo, "and it couldn't have been more than ten minutes until the sheriff phoned. Why, Dortha could hardly have been away from Beaverwood in Judd's truck! Waycroft and I should have met him if he came by the covered bridge!"

"And the sheriff should have, if he went the other way," Cranston supplied. "Take another look at that map, Margo, and see if you can find an answer."

"There isn't any," argued Margo. "Here's an old road that follows north beside Indian River, but it stops dead before it gets to the other valley. Dortha must have tacked some wings on that truck to take it where he did!"

WITHOUT a word, Cranston started the roadster and drove from Courtland along the road to Dead Man's Hill. Negotiating the steep grade, which was quite safe going up, he topped the ridge and eased down another slope to a stone bridge leading over Indian River. There he found the side road that Margo had mentioned and they followed it two miles northward until it ended at an old sawmill, where heavy woods, just ahead, were broken only by a narrow footpath.

"What now, Mr. Cranston?" queried Margo, jestingly. "Do we abandon our chariot and walk another mile to see the old covered bridge that we both know so well?"

"We'll do plenty of walking later," promised Cranston. "For the present, we'll try some navigation. Dortha style."

Coolly, Cranston picked a rutted spot by the river bank and drove the roadster into the stream. Then they were plowing against the current through water that occasionally topped the running boards, never higher. This was a dry season, and Indian River, though it flowed swift and deep in narrow spots, had trouble spreading through this widest portion of its bed. At intervals, Cranston picked spots that were almost dry and at one bend, where he deftly dodged a sandbar, he brought the front wheels to a patch that was out of water.

"Keep going!" exclaimed Margo. "If you stop, the sand may hold us, unless we're bogged already!"

Cranston was stepping out through the door on the driver's side, to grip a bush that projected from the dry sandbar. As he gestured, Margo saw what he was after. There, trapped by the very sand that the roadster had escaped, was a broken sign that bore the big-lettered word: DETOUR.

"Dortha was smart enough to pick it up," declared Cranston, "but he should have carried it farther down the river. I suppose he was over-anxious to get rid of it. We'll take it along with us for future reference."

Though the sign was broken, Margo wondered how Cranston was going to get it into the roadster. As she watched, she saw that the sign was portable, for Cranston began folding it on hinges that were an unusual embellishment for a detour sign. Completely folded, the thing formed a compact bundle that Cranston put

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into the rumble seat, where it slid out of sight.

In the car again, Cranston drove ahead and the covered bridge soon came in sight. Plowing right underneath it, he swung the car up the ruts where Margo had stalled the night before. There, parking beside the road, Cranston completed his analysis of Dortha's activities.

"You spent quite a while at Beaverwood," reminded Cranston, "considering those two stops at the gates. Dortha had time to return as far as the covered bridge, where he found Bosco waiting for him. The hound must have run loose and followed Dortha's trail until it dipped into the river. They're great pals, those two."

"I'll say they are," acknowledged Margo. "I'm still wondering which is the bigger brute."

"I heard them on the ledge," continued Cranston. "That's why I moved along the bridge. Bosco was whining and Dortha had just managed to quiet him when you arrived. If you'd driven across the bridge, you would have had no trouble. Instead, you used the ford and made it worse by stopping before you were across."

"Then Dortha thought I must have guessed his trick!" exclaimed Margo. "That's why he unleashed Bosco!"

"Bosco acted on his own," corrected Cranston. "If that dog could talk, you'd find that his worst vice is simply his loyalty to Dortha. That's why I dealt so gently with Bosco."

"You were too gentle with Dortha," demurred Margo. "When he let rip with that shotgun, he meant business."

"Only because I fired first," Cranston reminded. "I wanted to jostle Dortha from the ledge and I succeeded. You see, Margo" – Cranston's lips formed a slight smile – "Dortha has the same fault as Bosco – that of intense loyalty."

"To Dr. Marsh?"

"Exactly. But there is this difference. While Bosco can not talk, Dortha can. Dangerous though he may be, Dortha must be allowed to live, so that he can some day tell all he knows concerning Dr. Marsh. Last night a chance victim fell into a death trap. We must learn who plotted murder – and why."

Cranston gestured to the rumble seat and Margo understood. The detour sign, designed for portability, stood for more than a few maniacs accidentally roving from their quarters. Something was going on inside Beaverwood that involved matters of the outside world, and as The Shadow, Cranston intended to find all the answers to crime's origin.

Again the roadster was on its way, with Cranston gazing meditatively ahead as he followed the winding road through this valley of hidden crime. In the eyes of her companion, Margo could see the strange, burning glow that symbolized the probing vision of The Shadow!

CHAPTER VI

IN contrast to the short cut that he had taken from Courtland to the covered bridge, Lamont Cranston spent the next hour in describing circles that seemed to take him nowhere. Yet Margo Lane was very patient, because their journey had an objective. According to Cranston, he was seeking a new way into Beaverwood.

"The first way is through the main gate," explained Cranston. "The second is a way I discovered last night. What I'm looking for is a third way, that someone might use more easily than the other two."

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Cranston's hunt meant driving over dirt roads, with side excursions on foot. His object was to survey the entire boundary of the Beaverwood estate, which covered a few dozen acres. He and Margo began at the northwest corner, where Indian River, narrow, deep and turbulent, roared past the end of the high picket fence, which had projecting spikes extending over the water, to prevent anyone from climbing around it.

On the other side were the grounds of Gray Towers, but Cranston was interested in the stream itself. Dangling from Marsh's fence was a sign, warning that falls lay ahead, a fact to which Cranston could personally testify. When Margo asked if it would be possible to start down in a boat and swing into Marsh's shore, Cranston gave a slow nod.

"Possible," he declared, "but not practical. It would be as risky as scaling those pickets. Besides, there would be no way of getting out against the current without a special cable. What we're hunting for, Margo, is a regular route, usable under normal conditions."

Following the northern boundary away from Gray Towers, they used a log to cross a smaller stream that trickled under the fence itself. Pointing through the pickets, Cranston indicated a two-acre pond that had a level several feet higher than the nearby river. He drew Margo's attention to a mass of brush at the far end of the pond.

"A beaver dam," defined Cranston. "Probably abandoned by its original owners. It accounts for the name of Beaverwood."

The quest continued along the northern boundary and later followed the slope that marked the eastern side. All the while, Cranston and Margo were moving along beside the high, formidable fence that protected every inch of the sanitarium grounds. At last they came to the southeast corner and paused to rest beside a stone pillar that had sharp spikes across the top.

His gaze roving idly through the woods, Cranston traced a rough path that led down and away from Beaverwood. Instantly he became alert.

"This must have been an old gate," he said. "Likely enough, since that could have been a short road to the station in the days of horses and carriages. Those are young trees at the sides of the path; it was probably wider once."

Looking along the fence, Cranston discovered where the other gatepost had been. Its location was marked by a flat slab of stone underneath the lower pickets of the fence. Finding a large chunk of wood, Cranston used it as a lever and pried the slab loose. On hands and knees, Margo peered into the opening and exclaimed:

"Why, it's hollow underneath! Maybe there's treasure buried here!"

"I doubt it," returned Cranston, "but we'll soon find out. Treasure or no treasure, I think we've uncovered what we want."

SEATED on the turf, Cranston shoved the loosened slab with his feet. It slithered beneath the fence, leaving a sizable gap, which Margo, to her disappointment, saw was empty. Then Cranston was easing down into the pit and crouching beneath the fence. Once under, he called for Margo to follow and gave a hand to help her.

Inside the grounds, they slid the slab back where it belonged and turned in the direction of the sanitarium. If Cranston hadn't been with her, Margo would have hesitated at approaching that grim brown building, but his presence, plus the approaching dusk, gave the girl the necessary nerve.

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"We found what we wanted," undertoned Cranston, as they walked along. "The third way into Beaverwood."

"That makes one and three," reminded Margo. "I still want to know about the second."

"I'll show it to you later," began Cranston. "You'd have to see it to believe it –"

He halted suddenly and moved Margo into the shelter of some trees, which provided sufficient darkness for them to remain unobserved. Coming along a crosspath were two men, walking sullenly, staring straight ahead. They were two of Marsh's patients and they paused abruptly when they heard the clang of a distant bell. That clamor must have been the dinner call, for the patients showed more enthusiasm in their gait when they started toward the sanitarium.

"That clears the way," said Cranston. "We'll follow after them, but keep well in the background."

The last stretch was the most difficult, for it lay across open ground between the woods and the bulky building. The two patients kept doggedly ahead without a glance behind them, but a new chance of discovery occurred when a car came rolling up the driveway, its headlights glaring through the dusk and changing course with the curves. Margo was turning to get back to the woods, when Cranston caught her arm and steered her to the nearest wing of the building.

A moment later, they were entering a door that Cranston's keen eyes had detected in the gathering gloom. Margo was quite surprised when she looked around and saw that they were in a place resembling a carpenter's shop.

"The occupational–therapy department," explained Cranston. "This is where the patients learn to do things with their hands, to keep their minds off their troubles."

"Look, Lamont!" Margo had come across a stack of boards and was standing on them while she indicated a shelf containing cans of paint. "Here's everything that's needed to make a detour sign like the one we found below the covered bridge!"

"Everything except the tools," said Cranston, "but they're probably in that closet!" He pointed to a padlocked door at the rear of the large room. "We can remember this for future reference. Right now, we're getting out of here!"

"Back where we came from?"

"No. We'll save time if we go the other way. Make a detour around the building, Margo, and wait for me by the falls. The sun has set, so you won't have any trouble with your dark dress as a background against the woods."

"You aren't coming with me?"

"Not until I've learned who those visitors are. Their car has arrived out front, so I'm going to have a look alone."

STARTING Margo off on her route, Cranston sidled along the wing of the building, keeping close to its dark wall. Though he lacked the black garb of The Shadow, only the keenest eye could have spotted his moving figure in the heavy gloom. Reaching the end of the building, Cranston was as stealthy as The Shadow when he paused and peered beyond.

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Two men were standing beside the coupe that had brought them to Beaverwood. Against the faint sunset from the west, Cranston recognized the faces of Gordon Waycroft and Kirk Brenshaw. Facing them were two other men: one was Dr. Uther Marsh, while the other looked enough like Kirk to be his cousin, Hubert.

Evidently the visiting hours were almost over, for Dr. Marsh was trying to draw his patient away. However, Kirk was persistent in asking questions that proved the man who resembled him was indeed his cousin. He wanted to know if everything was satisfactory at Beaverwood and finally Kirk queried:

"You've been getting plenty of rest, haven't you, Hubert? You know it's good for you to get to bed early."

"If that's so, why don't you stay a while?" demanded Hubert, suddenly. "If I'm crazy, so are you."

"We must leave that to Dr. Marsh," parried Kirk. "You are ill, Hubert –"

"Not too ill to let you worry me," interrupted Hubert, savagely. "If you know what's good for you, you'll stay away from me."

"I'm thinking of what's good for you, Hubert, like I always have."

"Then maybe you'd like what's good for you!" With a fierce roar, Hubert flung his hands at his cousin's throat. "A little neck-wringing, Kirk!"

Kirk sagged to his knees, clawing at Hubert's throttling hands. Fighting to wrench Hubert away, Marsh and Waycroft had just succeeded when Dortha arrived and took charge of the patient. While Dortha marched Hubert into the sanitarium, Waycroft helped Kirk into the car. Clutching his throat with one hand, Kirk gulped a few incoherent threats that were drowned by the roar of the motor as Waycroft drove away.

Hubert's laugh was coming back in a crazed, but happy tone. As if in echo came a baying sound from Bosco's kennel behind the building. Dr. Marsh paused a few moments; then decided that the hound had heard the sounds of the disturbance. So the physician simply followed Dortha and Hubert indoors.

Cranston was not deceived by Bosco's howls. More The Shadow than himself, Cranston sped along past the front door almost before Marsh closed it. Clear of the building, he hurried toward Indian Falls, watching for some sign of Margo. Noting motion among the trees above the brink, Cranston changed his course and met Margo on the way. With a glad gasp, Margo stumbled into his arms.

IN one hand, Margo was carrying her shoes and stockings, while with the other, she was lifting her water-soaked skirt above her knees. Breathlessly, she explained her predicament.

"I came to the beaver dam," said Margo, "and decided to wade the little stream that flows from it. I was half across before I realized that it would bring me too far above the falls. So I started back in such a hurry that I turned my ankle. Of course, that tripped me into the stream. Bosco must have heard me."

Bosco had heard and Dortha in his turn had interpreted the dog's howl to mean that strangers were on the premises. Having tucked Hubert Brenshaw away, Dortha had loosed Bosco, for the hound's bay, rising loud and fierce, was approaching the very spot where Margo stood with Cranston. Frantically, Margo looked for a friendly tree and actually thought that Cranston was going to boost her up one, when he suddenly stooped and scooped her in his arms. Then, before Margo could even gasp, the incredible was in progress.

With a long stride, Cranston left the river bank at the very brink of Indian Falls, carrying Margo with him on a seemingly certain plunge into the mighty cataract below!

CHAPTER VII

IT was a daytime nightmare, the experience that followed. It belonged to daytime because the last rays of sunset reflected on this spot that lay open to the west, giving a vivid sparkle to the sheen of the furious water that billowed across the brink. Yet there were all the elements of a nightmare, even to the slow-motion effect. It was something that couldn't be real, but was. As she was precipitated forward in Cranston's descending grasp, Margo flung her head about and looked across his shoulder for what she thought was a last view of the safety that they had abandoned. At that moment, Cranston's foot stopped with a hard jolt upon a rock, and as he poised there, Margo gave a gladdened gasp that ended in a shriek.

No longer was it safe behind them, even if Cranston could return. Leaping through the alders that lined the bank came Bosco, panting like a hell-hound, eager to hurl his fury upon the people who had escaped him by the covered bridge. True to dog tradition, Bosco was acting thrice his size on his home grounds and considering his normal bulk, that made him as tremendous as Margo's horror pictured him.

Another instant and Bosco would have launched himself upon his prey, regardless of the plunge that would receive him also. In that moment, Cranston swerved, despite Margo's shriek that a menace lay behind them. There wasn't time for the girl to word the warning, though Cranston understood it. Nevertheless, it didn't matter, because he was ignoring Margo's cry.

Instead of a full turn, Cranston made a half pivot toward the far bank and with it took another long step. His foot reached a flat rock that was only two inches above the water line and from it, in almost the same motion, he made a long sidestep toward the brink. His footwork served one purpose; it carried him beyond the range of Bosco's leap. The dog saw it and caught up with a quick slide to its haunches that saved it from a plunge. Bosco's forepaws went across the bank, but the dog managed to scramble back.

Margo's eyes went shut; then opened. Cranston had pivoted again and she was looking down across his shoulder. What she saw completely unnerved her. She was staring straight down into the mist that rose from Indian Falls and through the spray she saw the jagged rocks a hundred feet below. All about, the tumult of the water was a monster's roar, shouting that the flood would snatch its victims yet.

But Cranston was keeping on to the other bank!

Limp in her friend's powerful arms, Margo was no longer a burden. Through her brain pummeled the thought that this was too unreal to matter. With that conviction, she realized what was happening; indeed, she viewed it step by step, though she still could not believe it. Along the brink of the waterfall, through a gushing mass that at first glance looked impassable, Cranston was following a zigzag course from rock to rock, picking them out like stepping-stones.

IT was simply a case of the indomitable nerve that had made Cranston famous as The Shadow. He did more than face danger; he defied it. Where others, even the bravest, would shrink from a formidable threat, The Shadow preferred to study it from a cool, normal viewpoint. He had done that very thing the night before, when Marsh's men were moving in to trap him. In the moonlight he had gauged the distance between the rocks and calculated their firmness. Precarious though they might appear, those juts of stone would not be hanging on the brink of the falls unless they were really fixed there. Having chanced a passage once and succeeded without trouble, Cranston had no hesitance at trying it again, even with Margo as a handicap.

Complete fascination riveted Margo during the remainder of the trip. The moments that she seemed to hang above the falls were no more breath-taking than when Cranston's side steps carried her the other direction and let her stare into the green flood that gave its last gush toward the brink. Then, instead of the water's green, Margo was viewing the same hue of the trees, and the mighty tumult was dying behind her. They were

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safe on the opposite bank.

As Cranston took quick strides along a path, Margo looked back in profound amazement. Again, the vast pour of water gave the illusion that The Shadow's stepping-stones were insignificant. Back on Marsh's shore, Bosco was whining as Dortha came clumping through the bushes. Margo saw the huge man stop and shade his eyes toward the falls. Like Bosco, Dortha couldn't believe that any creature, human or otherwise, had gone across that brink.

Clear of the woods, Cranston settled Margo on the soft grass of Waycroft's lawn and pointed to Gray Towers, outlined against the twilight.

"Wait until it's really dark," said Cranston. "Then you can go there and wait until I arrive with the car. I don't think Waycroft keeps any wild beasts which will disturb you."

"I'll wait in the Italian garden," returned Margo. Then, clutching Cranston's arm tightly, she pleaded: "But you're not going back across that waterfall!"

"Of course not," laughed Cranston. "We just beat the sunset gun, Margo. It won't be really safe until the moon rises, two hours from now." He paused whimsically. "Bosco will be tied up by then, so we might try it again."

"Never!" exclaimed Margo. "You must promise –"

"I'll promise only to come back with the car," interposed Cranston. "I'll go up to that dirt road that runs behind Gray Towers and crosses the river about a half mile in back of the Beaverwood fence. We left the car over by the northeast corner of Marsh's grounds, but it won't take me long to reach it. So be watching for the signal, Margo, and don't forget these."

Cranston handed Margo her shoes and stockings, which she had clutched all during the trip across the falls, only to drop them when she clutched Cranston's arm and begged him to avoid the return trip. A moment later, Cranston was off on his hike to the back road and Margo, after a few minutes' wait, decided that it was dark enough to approach Gray Towers. She didn't bother to put on her shoes and stockings, because they were still wet, and the soft grass felt comfortable underfoot.

The windows of Gray Towers were well lighted and Margo could see people moving beyond them, an indication that the Italian garden would be deserted, which it proved to be when Margo crept toward it. There was one fault, however, with this waiting spot; its white marble pillars made the worst possible background for Margo's dark dress. That problem was easily settled, however. Near the garden, Margo slid the dress off and hung it on a bush to dry with her shoes and stockings. The white things that formed her remaining attire made a perfect blend against the pillars and benches of the garden.

TWENTY minutes had passed when a door opened and two men came from Gray Towers. For a moment Margo was inclined to make a wild dart to the bush that she had turned into a clothes tree; then, sure that she'd be seen by the glow from the house, she shrank back between two pillars and remained motionless, hoping she'd be mistaken for some of the white statuary that stood about the garden. As luck had it, the two men paused before they reached the garden. One lighted a cigar and stood by, while the other began to pace along the flat stone walk.

The man with the cigar was Gordon Waycroft; his companion was Kirk Brenshaw. Evidently Kirk was nervous, for he continued to pace back and forth.

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"At least I've convinced the sheriff," spoke Waycroft. "I told him that Beaverwood ought to be watched, even if we have to pay for the hire of the deputies."

"The sheriff is a fool!" snapped Kirk. "He thinks because he didn't find a detour sign, there couldn't have been any truck going up to Beaverwood."

"You can't argue with the sheriff," expressed Waycroft. "He doesn't specialize in deduction. It's what you see, not what you think, where he's concerned."

"But he knows that somebody phoned him about the sign and the truck!" asserted Kirk. "Therefore it couldn't all be rumor, could it?"

Waycroft gave a light laugh.

"That's all it can be, Kirk," he said. "The sheriff is right, considering that some practical joker may have phoned him. But he knows that I don't deal in jests. I told him what happened at Beaverwood when we went there a little while ago."

"You mean about Hubert? The way he attacked me?"

"Of course," replied Waycroft. "Marsh had no right to let Hubert get out of hand. If you want, I'll show the sheriff the threatening letters that look as though they came from Hubert."

Kirk appeared to be thinking over the suggestion while he continued his pace along the walk. Margo noted that he had fallen into her habit of the night before. With his slow stride, Kirk was attracted by the glistening stones among the varied slabs that formed the ornamental walk. He was picking them with his feet, more or less mechanically. It seemed to help his thought.

"Those letters won't prove much," said Kirk, finally, "except that Hubert is out of his mind, which is already established."

"They show negligence on the part of Dr. Marsh," asserted Waycroft. "He had no right to let Hubert send them."

"That's right!" Kirk finished a pace and turned to stare into the darkness in the general direction of Beaverwood. "The letters would count after all! But we still haven't proven that Marsh lets his patients have free run, despite his claims to the contrary."

"Leave that to the sheriff," decided Waycroft. "He's posting deputies on every road tonight. Suppose we go into the house and talk with the others. It's nearly dinner time and you chaps are taking the 9:10 train to New York."

As the pair turned toward the mansion, the lights of a car swept up the driveway. Both Waycroft and Kirk paused, as though wondering who this belated guest might be. Margo could tell, because the headlights gave a few blinks while they were turning off. It was Cranston, back with the roadster.

Fortunately, Waycroft decided to go back through the house before learning who the visitor was. That gave Margo her opportunity, though she knew it might be brief. As soon as Waycroft and Kirk were inside Gray Towers, Margo dropped her alabaster pose and scampered from the garden. The darkness had become so thick that she had to claw frantically at three bushes before she found the right one; discovering it, she slid into her dress and groped for shoes and stockings. While she was putting on her shoes, the car lights gave a

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quick blink signaling for her to hurry and a few moments later Margo was making a mad dash across the lawn past Gray Towers.

Cranston intercepted Margo before she reached the car. At the edge of the driveway, his firm hand clutched her suddenly and she heard his undertone:

"Waycroft is coming out to meet us. Remember, we just dropped by. Whatever we learn about Beaverwood is our own business."

With that, Cranston was escorting Margo forward into a great patch of light that spread from the open front door. Hardly had they reached the fringe before Waycroft met them; he had been coming out from the mansion while Margo was still making her rapid run. Brushing back her hair, Margo greeted Waycroft with a smile.

"Here I am again," said Margo. "I brought Lamont this evening. I hope we aren't intruding, but he's so anxious to hear about last night, and you said you wanted to talk with him."

"I do, more than before," assured Waycroft, extending his hand to Cranston. "Perhaps you can help us solve the local riddle, Cranston, even though the crime – if there was any – is a thing of the past."

With all his suspicions, Gordon Waycroft apparently did not know that murder had been done the night before. There were facts upon which Lamont Cranston, otherwise The Shadow, could have supplied important details that concerned past crime. But that was only half the story – and the lesser half.

Tonight, still unsuspected even by The Shadow, another path of doom awaited the rising of the murder moon! Crime was to strike anew, in a style more mysterious than the night before!

CHAPTER VIII

DINNER at Waycroft's was something of a bore to Margo Lane. At the start, she felt it wise to remain inconspicuous, rather than have people notice that her attire was still somewhat disheveled, more so than a trip by automobile would account for. However, since Margo was the only lady present, no one took particular notice of her clothes. Indeed, Margo was almost totally ignored in the course of conversation.

Waycroft discussed events of the night before, so far as he had witnessed them. Kirk Brenshaw introduced a few reminders as did three other men present. Like Kirk, these three were men of considerable consequence who had placed demented friends or relatives in charge of Dr. Marsh. Naturally, all were anxious to make sure that matters were right at Beaverwood, but like Kirk, business was calling them back to New York.

"Sharrock was the last man to come along the valley road," declared Waycroft, gesturing to a mustached gentleman at his left. "That is, the last to arrive at Gray Towers. He had Brighton with him" – Waycroft nodded toward a quiet, gray-haired man across the table – "and they saw no detour sign. If they had, they would have wondered about it, because both know that the road to Beaverwood is a dead end."

The term "dead end" impressed Margo. The Shadow had certainly found it such the night before. His discovery of hideous murder was bad enough, but the jeopardy in which he had placed himself was even worse. Margo could scarcely repress a shudder when she thought of the huge risk The Shadow had taken in his first trip across the brink of Indian Falls, a desperate pathway that he calculated as safe, yet had never before tested.

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"The detour sign must have been planted later," continued Waycroft. "That is" – his tone became dubious – "if there actually happened to be such a sign. The whole thing is a complete mystery, like those shots that we heard later."

Cranston's eyebrows lifted quizzically.

"What shots?"

"They came from the general direction of the gorge," explained Waycroft. He took a pencil and drew some lines on the tablecloth. "Below the falls is a deep, impassable gorge, quite short, because the hills taper away into the valley, and the river widens before it reaches the covered bridge. When we heard those shots, we started over toward the bridge, but turned up into the gorge as far as we could go. There was no sign of anyone."

Cranston did not even smile. The shots, of course, were those that he had exchanged with Dortha, near the covered bridge itself. Cranston's steady eyes warned Margo not to change her own expression. True to his tradition as *The Shadow*, Cranston was working on the assumption that the more the element of mystery in a case, the quicker it would crack.

It developed during dinner that Sharrock and Brighton were going to drive to New York in the former's car. They offered to take Kirk Brenshaw with them and extended the same invitation to the last member of the group, an elderly, tired-faced man named Abershaw. But neither Kirk nor Abershaw relished the idea of a cramped ride in the folding seats of a coupe.

"You can take us as far as the station," said Kirk, "so we can catch the local at 9:10. We certainly ought to leave before nine o'clock in order to be sure of catching the train."

It was already half past eight and the moon was rising through the front windows of the dining room; a blood-red moon, hanging huge above the horizon. Out of the night came the chugging sound of a rattletrap car and Waycroft tilted his head, to show a broad smile below his gray-eyed twinkle.

"Our friend the sheriff," announced Waycroft. "I recognize his gasoline-powered junk pile. I rather think he's worrying about those unexplained shots, too."

WAYCROFT went to the door and returned with the sheriff, who was talking such a steady streak that he could only nod to the other persons present. The sheriff was telling how he had posted deputies on strategic roads and to make it all clear, he worked on the tablecloth map from the point where Waycroft had left off. Soon the cloth showed a network of lines, with little dots all about.

"We're checking every car that comes or goes," affirmed the sheriff. "We'll find out if fake detour signs and strange trucks are real or not. If anything funny happens around these parts tonight, our own men will be the fellows who call up about it. I still can't figure who played that hoax last night "

"Some of my guests will be driving down to the station," declared Waycroft. "How long will the deputies delay them, sheriff?"

"They'll only have to go past Hapgood's post," the sheriff said. "He's keeping out of sight by the big ledge, so's he can watch the road that splits off to the station from t'other that goes around by Brown's Hill. A right smart chap, Hapgood. He'll be Johnny-on-the-spot any time a car comes along."

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"In that case, I'd better pack my suitcase," put in Kirk. "We'll have to get started early if Hapgood is going to stop us on the road."

"Perhaps the sheriff can drive ahead," suggested Waycroft, "and wait there while Hapgood checks you through."

"Glad to," assured the sheriff. "I'll want Happy's report, anyway. Then I'll drive around by Brown's Hill and stop at the other posts."

"I'd better pack, anyway," said Kirk. "It's getting along toward nine. Anything you want to see me about, Gordon?"

"Only those letters," replied Waycroft. "They're in the study. I'll get them for you."

Remembering the letters, Margo wanted to mention them to Cranston, but realized she would have to wait. It wouldn't do to discuss the apprehensions of Waycroft and Kirk over matters at Beaverwood, even during their absence, because their friends were still present, talking with the sheriff. After all, Cranston personally could vouch that affairs were amiss at Beaverwood, hence the conversation that Margo had heard while posing as a garden statue could hardly be of great consequence.

Shortly after they left, Waycroft and Kirk returned. Carrying a bag, Kirk waved good night and said he would wait for the others in the car. The other three guests got up and sauntered out to begin their roundabout journey along the winding roads to the Hilldale station. Soon a honking horn told the sheriff that he was wanted, so he went out to start his rattletrap. Both cars had pulled away when Waycroft suggested that his two remaining guests – Cranston and Margo – enjoy the coolness of the Italian garden.

Margo could have smiled at that one, considering her recent sojourn in the garden, but she was in too serious a mood. Noting that Waycroft was going back to his study, Margo saw her opportunity to give Cranston the few details that she had overheard outdoors, details that she hoped would add at least a bit to the fund of facts that he had already acquired regarding the situation over in Beaverwood. As they stepped from the side doorway of the mansion, Margo began:

"The walk to the garden is just around the corner, Lamont. You can see it easily, because some of the stones glisten. While we're on the way there, I'll tell you some things I heard –"

SUCH recollections left Margo's mind as a sudden sound interrupted. It came with the quickness of a stab so forcefully that it jarred the girl's nerves completely. The sound was the fateful voice of Bosco, the great hound, raised in a distant cry that started as a yelp and turned into a bay.

Weird, that howl, like a harbinger of death from the premises where Dr. Marsh ruled!

With the cry from Beaverwood came floating sounds of insane laughter that might have been anywhere amid those grounds across the narrow river. It was a chorus that betokened murder, amplified when the great dog repeated its mighty howl, beneath the sky that was tinted blood-red by the rising moon!

Though riveted by the curdling cry, Margo tried to stammer an explanation.

"It's... it's only the moon!" As she gasped, Margo clutched Cranston's arm so tightly that he knew she didn't believe her own words. "I... I mean Bosco... he's baying at the moon... the way dogs sometimes do –"

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"Not old dogs like Bosco." Cranston's hand gripped Margo's arm and turned her toward the front of the house. "Something had disturbed that dog. For all we know, murder may be on the loose. It's our business to find out where!"

At that moment Waycroft arrived, springing from the door as though something had snatched him from within the house. He heard Cranston's words and voiced further information.

"You're right, Cranston!" exclaimed Waycroft. "It means death and Kirk Brenshaw may be the victim. Either Kirk or some of his friends, though he's the one most likely to meet up with it. We'll have to overtake them and warn them before the menace reaches them! Hurry, Cranston – we'll use your car!"

Waycroft's admonition was unnecessary. Already, Cranston was racing toward the car, taking Margo along with him, so fast that Waycroft could just about keep up. As they neared the roadster, Cranston sprang ahead; he had the key in the lock while Waycroft was helping Margo into the car.

"They can't be very far along!" panted Waycroft. "Maybe they're past the covered bridge; at least I hope they are. The danger spot will be the road that leads up to Beaverwood."

"We can't overtake them that soon," said Cranston, as he gave the car a swift twirl along the driveway. "We'll be lucky if we find them at the ledge down toward the station. Still, if they get that far, the sheriff will be with them."

"He's going to pass them through," reminded Waycroft in an anxious tone. "The station isn't far beyond. If that train doesn't come along, Kirk will be stranded, with only Abershaw, who is old and feeble –"

"But if the train doesn't come along, we will," assured Cranston, calmly. "So sit tight, Waycroft, until we get there."

There was a firmness in Cranston's tone that should have ended Margo's qualms along with those of Waycroft, but the girl's heart kept beating hard. Perhaps it was the presence of the bloody moon that worried Margo. There had been murder and mystery both, last night when the moon was only silvery. Tonight's setting was even stronger for such a double dose.

At times, Margo's intuition could outvote her confidence in Cranston. At this moment, all her instinct told her that murder was in the making, once more prepared to strike before the arrival of The Shadow!

CHAPTER IX

A CAR had stopped by the big ledge where Hapgood, the deputy, was on duty. It was the sheriff's car and he had pulled it to the side of the road, while he gestured with a flashlight for the next car to come through. Thanks to down grades, the sheriff had made rapid time in his rattletrap and Sharrock's car had been speeding to keep pace with him.

Off in the distance came the plaintive whistle of a locomotive, floating from an adjacent valley. The train was still a few miles distant and wouldn't reach Hilldale for another ten minutes, but the sheriff didn't want the men in the other car to worry about missing it. So he waved them through and they went past without stopping. A short way on, the coupe's tail-lights veered suddenly as it twisted off along the station road.

"Waycroft's guests," the sheriff told Hapgood, who was standing by. "They're catching the 9:10. But don't let nobody else go through, without questioning them. See you later, Happy."

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There was prophecy in the sheriff's tone, though he did not realize it. He was to see Hapgood later, but under unfortunate circumstances and that later meeting would be sooner than the sheriff expected.

So far, the sheriff hadn't guessed that something new was amiss at Beaverwood. His loud-spoken car had been making far too much noise for him to hear Bosco's baying cry while traveling along the valley road. Nor had Hapgood heard that sound, for the rise of woods behind the big ledge cut off all sounds from the direction of Beaverwood.

Climbing into his car, the sheriff pulled away and swung to the road that led up Brown's Hill. As he went, it did not occur to him to look back. If it had, the sheriff might have been able to prevent the tragedy that was due.

Directly behind Hapgood was the big ledge and the deputy drew back into its shelter as soon as the sheriff started away. Hapgood preferred to be close to the ledge, because it kept him out of sight. Here, due to a twist in the road, the moon was rising directly above the ledge and soon its light would be playing on the road itself. Hence Hapgood's action was really a future precaution.

The deputy should have given more thought to the present.

ALREADY, the moon was peeping through the trees above the ledge. If the sheriff had glanced up there, he would have seen the thing that Hapgood couldn't see. Atop the ledge, a huddled head and shoulders were moving against the ruddy disk that formed a background for murder. An insidious figure was engaged in a task befitting that ominous setting. It changed from a huddled shape to something grotesque, that figure, because its hands were lifting a loose chunk of the foliated rock.

Over the edge it slid, like water across a brink. So easily did deft hands ease it, that the falling missile did not make its tumble heard. No timing could have been more exact; no aim more accurate. The two combined to produce a hideous result. The toppled mass struck the back of Hapgood's head, with the crushing momentum gathered in its dozen-foot fall.

Death at least was merciful. The victim never realized what had hit him. The result, however, was a ghastly sight. Hurlled forward by the impact, Hapgood's body was a gory spectacle when it sprawled at the edge of the road. Splitting as it struck the ground, the crushing stone broke into two segments, as though announcing that it, too, had suffered while performing its ugly work.

Above the ledge, the ever-rising moon was changing its ruddy circle to a coppery hue. Seemingly, its tinge had been transferred to the victim whose sudden death it had witnessed. No longer, however, was a huddled shape visible against the surface of the murder moon. The great orb was beaming unobstructed. Silently, the killer had slipped away along a path that ran above the ledge, the very direction of his course as hidden as his motive.

From somewhere along the valley road came the smooth, speedy rhythm of an approaching car, rising, falling in relation to the curves and dips of the highway. Closer than before came the ardent screech of the locomotive whistle, announcing that the train had clipped half the distance into the Hilldale station. All about lay darkness where the trees obscured the moon, and in that thickened night a killer was taking complete advantage of the few vital minutes he needed for departure.

The scene was changed when a pair of powerful headlights swept around a bend. The long-reaching glare caught Hapgood's body in its range and the car came to a smooth but sudden stop. From the wheel of the roadster, Lamont Cranston studied the gruesome exhibit lying in the road, while Margo Lane turned her face away. From the far side of the car came a grim tone, the voice of Gordon Waycroft.

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"Too late!" declared Waycroft. "It must be Kirk Brenshaw. Though how the killer snatched him from Sharrock's car –"

"He didn't," interposed Cranston, opening his door and stepping out. "The victim must be Hapgood. I can see his deputy's badge. Take the wheel, Margo, and keep going to the station. Warn Kirk before the killer overtakes him."

Stiffening as she took the wheel, Margo started ahead and turned into the road where Waycroft pointed with a shaky hand. The whistle of the locomotive, shrieking for the grade crossing, was a discordant tumult as it neared them. Here the road twisted along beside the tracks, and when Margo applied the brakes on the final bend, she saw the moving tail-lights of Sharrock's car, pulling over by the platform.

Then, in the glare of the arriving locomotive, four men were visible as they alighted from the coupe. Two were shaking hands with the other pair as the train slackened into the station, until Waycroft sprang out and halted the farewell ceremony. Above the tumult he shouted what had happened and his voice was clearly heard while the train stood still. Then, seeing that there were to be no passengers from Hilldale, the conductor pulled the bell cord and the local chugged along its way. Waycroft's statement was brief. They must all return to the ledge and stay close together until the sheriff could be summoned. Through sheer force of numbers if nothing more, they could overpower the murderer if they met him.

BACK at the scene of crime, Lamont Cranston had undergone a rapid transformation, thanks to a cloak and hat that he had brought from beside him when he left the roadster. As The Shadow, Cranston had become part of darkness itself and was listening for any sound that might disturb the newly gathered silence. One thing was evident: Hapgood's murderer could not have traveled far; but rather than start on a blind trail, The Shadow was hoping for an audible clue.

None forthcoming, The Shadow stepped past Hapgood's body and reached the high ledge. The layers of that hovering rock formed a veritable ladder for a climber like The Shadow. Digging his hands into crevices, The Shadow worked upward, finding footholds as he went. He was reversing the route that the falling missile had taken and accomplishing it in silent fashion. At the top, The Shadow raised his head and shoulders to peer both ways along the path that sloped behind the ledge.

Soon there were sounds of cars down where the road divided; they were stopping there to keep a respectful distance. Coming over the ledge top, The Shadow began to probe with his tiny flashlight. He recognized this path; it was the one that led down from the forgotten gateway at the corner of the Beaverwood estate, the old road that had once crossed the valley highway and continued to the station, forming a corner where now there was a fork. The Shadow was about to turn in the direction of Beaverwood, when he heard men approaching Hapgood's body.

Like The Shadow, these arrivals decided to scale the ledge. It was obvious that they would turn toward Beaverwood, so The Shadow decided to let them start their search. Knowing the qualms of Waycroft and his friends, The Shadow recognized that they would stay close together, giving him ample leeway to circle past them. To let them begin operations, The Shadow moved silently down the path toward the station road.

That was The Shadow's one mistake!

Flashlights burned with sudden brilliance from the edge of the ledge. These weren't Waycroft and his friends, they were a pair of deputies who must have been coming down from Brown's Hill when the cars returned from the station. To avoid them, The Shadow sidled behind a thick tree on the lower side of the path. He was just in time to receive another barrage of flashlights.

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The new glares were coming up the path and they picked out The Shadow with their beams. Only momentarily did they hold him, as he made a swift glide for thicker darkness, but in doing so, he met the accidental sweep of the lights from the ledge. From the lower end of the path came a shout that The Shadow recognized as the sheriff's and it was answered by an equally healthy yell from the deputies on the ledge.

"There he goes! Get him!"

INSTANTLY, the woods seemed alive with men. The sheriff must have met a squad of deputies who were ready to be posted. Hearing of Hapgood's death, he was making good use of his men, for they were boxing in The Shadow from two directions. Waycroft and his timid friends weren't even needed in this sortie, except as reserves. The thing had become a man hunt with The Shadow mistaken for the missing murderer who certainly could not be far away!

Knowing the deadly effect of shotguns when fired at close range, The Shadow had very little choice. In the sweep of the flashlights that he was partially avoiding, he saw a small gully off at an angle from the path. Darting in another direction, The Shadow reversed course and took a long dive into the depression, just as the shotguns ripped in devastating style. There were thwacks as buckshot buried itself in tree trunks, tuned to the loud rips of falling boughs, torn loose by the scattering slugs. Landing below the level of the gunfire, The Shadow sank deep in a bed of dried leaves that cushioned his spectacular dive.

To those who glimpsed the first phase of his disappearance, The Shadow seemed scarcely more than an intangible phantasm, an illusion created by the sweep of their own lights. Still, they were in a mood to accept such things as real and talk about it later. Flashlights continued their flicker, accompanied by spasmodic bursts from shotguns. Among other things, men spotted the gully and shouted that they were going to search it. Naturally, others shied away from approaching lights, rather than be in the path of a discharging shotgun. Taking advantage of that factor, The Shadow picked a quick avenue of escape, traveling up and out of the gully as lights lowered to focus into its depths.

The rustle of leaves meant nothing, since several men were trampling through them. What bothered The Shadow was the incessant blinking of the flashlights that men used to announce their own locations. They came from various directions and whenever they outlined anything from a rock to a stump, somebody let rip with a shotgun. Indeed, The Shadow was taking chances on becoming a casualty even without being observed, until he introduced a piece of strategy that was in keeping with the current procedure.

Twisting the end of the tiny flashlight, The Shadow boldly began blinking his own torch. Its widened beam sufficiently resembled the others to give him the same security as the deputies who were hunting him. Coolly, The Shadow was working outward through the irregular circle that was closing to trap him, his blinks identifying him as a member of the searching party. The only flaw was the fact that he was retiring instead of coming closer. Once clear, The Shadow intended to extinguish his light and move off through the darkness, but the sheriff spotted the gleam too soon.

Mistaking The Shadow for a roving searcher, the sheriff shouted for others to copy his tactics. Too many men were clustering around the vacant gully and a wider search was in order. Hence The Shadow found himself in the curious situation of leading a hunt for himself, since others promptly took his light as a guide as they spread out through the woods. There was one advantage, and a strong one, to this fan-wise search. Eventually The Shadow would be able to douse his light and steal away, since by then the lights would be too far apart for the sheriff to keep track of them. Meanwhile, however, the cloaked investigator was following a blind course deep into the woods, away from any direction that Hapgood's murderer would logically have taken.

The trail that held death's riddle was lost, along with the fleeting minutes that The Shadow needed to regain it!

CHAPTER X

DURING the progress of the singular hunt that The Shadow was conducting for himself, a group of men were clustered by the roadside where Hapgood's body lay. The group consisted of Gordon Waycroft and his erstwhile guests: Kirk Brenshaw and three other men whose relatives were inmates of Beaverwood Sanitarium. They spoke in hushed and fearful tones, those four, diverting their eyes from the ghastly exhibit that lay at their feet. To a man, they agreed that Hapgood was a victim of a maniac murderer escaped from Marsh's institution. The consensus, though not openly voiced, was that Kirk's cousin, Hubert Brenshaw, was the most likely candidate, since Hubert had recently exhibited homicidal tendencies.

The only stanch man present was Gordon Waycroft. He was not hushed; he was silent, and with it grim. Waycroft alone was armed, but his weapon was merely the one-shot antique pistol for which he had no ammunition. As on the other night, Waycroft had brought along the ancient firearm to give himself confidence. Moving away from the group, Waycroft stopped occasionally beside Margo's roadster, where the girl was seated at the wheel.

"I'm afraid they're getting colder," said Waycroft, referring to the sheriff's men. "They're beating off through the woods as if they were hunting a wild goose. They ought to be searching the path to Beaverwood."

Margo agreed but did not say so. She felt sure that The Shadow was already following that lead. It didn't occur to her that he had instead become the object of a search.

"I suppose Cranston is with them," continued Waycroft. "It would be a good idea if Kirk and his friends joined the search. It would relieve their own fears and they would be safer among the deputies. A crazed murderer is the sort most likely to return to the scene of his crime."

Acting on that thought, Waycroft went over and spoke to Kirk's group. Immediately imbued with alarm, they started down the road toward the lower end of the path where a deputy stood on guard. Their intent was to report to him and offer their services in the hunt as Waycroft had suggested. As soon as they were gone, Waycroft beckoned Margo from her car.

"You're a game girl," complimented Waycroft. "You proved that last night, Margo. Why don't we start up toward Beaverwood and find what clues we can? Somebody ought to inspect that path before the deputies trample it."

IT was Margo's opinion that the path was already being inspected by The Shadow, though she happened to be wrong because he was still engaged in shaking off the deputies by pretending to be one of them. Nevertheless that was a good reason for accepting Waycroft's suggestion. If menace still roved, in the person of a demented murderer loose from the asylum, the hazard could be avoided by keeping close to The Shadow. So Margo, after due reluctance, decided in favor of Waycroft's idea without giving the slightest hint as to her own conclusions.

Together Waycroft and Margo walked along the road a good hundred yards beyond the ledge, in the direction of Beaverwood. There, Waycroft spotted an easy slope with his flashlight and helped Margo up the embankment. Moving through the trees they soon reached the path that led to Beaverwood and began their probe, Margo using a flashlight of her own.

It was Margo who made the first discovery.

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There were no footprints on the path for the ground was too hard, but something grayish was lying fifty feet away. Reaching the object, Margo saw that it was a rough, cloth glove, the fingers bearing mud stains. Obviously it could have been used by the man who dislodged the rock that crushed Hapgood's skull, hence this was evidence to prove that the murderer had started back to Beaverwood after the crime.

Looking back, Margo saw Waycroft's flashlight moving the other way. He had decided to scout the trail from its beginning, down by the ledge. Rather than call him, Margo decided to hunt for further clues. Carefully sidestepping the glove, she continued on toward Beaverwood, flicking her flashlight left and right. In less than half a minute she came upon a second clue as tangible as the first.

Lying beside the path was an old felt hat that had probably been brushed from the killer's head by an overhanging bough that extended a few feet farther along. The hat was lying brim up and inside the weather-beaten head-piece Margo saw two markings, the traces of gold initials that had been inserted when the hat was new. Stooping with the flashlight, the girl made out the initials. They were H.B., dim yet discernible.

Hubert Brenshaw!

Looking at the bough, Margo calculated it as six feet above the ground. Hubert, she had been told, was a bigger man than his stocky cousin, Kirk, about the right height to encounter the obstruction. Naturally a fleeing killer, particularly a deranged one, would care no more for a lost hat than a dropped glove. Leaving the second clue where it lay, Margo continued along the path in hope of finding a third.

Luck was still good when Margo reached a soft patch in the path. Here was a spot that a broad jumper could not have cleared; therefore a rational man would have dodged around it to avoid leaving telltale tracks. But the trail went right through in the form of two well-planted footprints, indicating that the man who made them had been loping rapidly along the path, utterly careless of anything that he encountered.

Square-toed footprints; these. If they belonged to Hubert he had doubtless made them with old shoes, which, like the hat and gloves, belonged among some clothing that had been sent to him at Beaverwood. Once these items were tallied and identified, the case against Hubert Brenshaw would be closed. It would be hard to pin murder on an insane inmate of a sanitarium, but Dr. Uther Marsh would unquestionably suffer for his negligence in letting a homicidal maniac loose.

There was much of the vindictive in Margo's mind as she pointed the flashlight along the path to see what else lay beyond those telltale foot tracks. The beam showed the picket fence of Beaverwood, some fifty yards ahead; there, the path ended at the spot that Margo and Cranston had visited that afternoon. Remembering the hollow space beneath the slab that represented the old gatepost, Margo realized that it formed another link in this incriminating trail that led to Hubert Brenshaw. The law needed only to prove that lunatics could use a direct way in and out of Beaverwood; with such, the case against Dr. Marsh would be clinched.

SUDDENLY, that flood of thoughts was dissipated from Margo's mind. Fear was the emotion that blotted out all else. As she focused the flashlight through the fence, Margo saw a figure loom into the glare.

Not the cloaked shape of The Shadow, who should be hereabouts, but that of a monstrous creature, which, if human, might be a greater menace than any beast!

Dropping back in fright, Margo found she couldn't force a cry to her lips. Then, the very dread that riveted her to the spot brought her relief from terror. The flashlight, glued in the girl's hand, retained its steady beam, showing vacancy beyond the fence. Some curious reflection of the light, plus Margo's own imagination, seemed wholly responsible for her hallucination.

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There was no one beyond the fence. Nothing but tree stumps to account for the illusion of a looming, living shape. Margo remembered those tree stumps from the afternoon; one was fairly near the fence, the others were spaced among the trees through which the Beaverwood path continued.

Catching her breath with a nervous laugh, Margo turned about and started down the path, hoping to find Waycroft. She wanted to tell him about the clues that she had found, though she would have preferred to contact The Shadow first and acquaint him with the subject. In fact, Margo took courage from the prospect of The Shadow's possible presence, believing that at any moment she might hear an identifying whisper from her cloaked friend. The Shadow had a habit of moving silently into a picture such as this.

So did the figure that actually took up the trail. It came from beneath the picket fence!

There was nothing wrong with Margo's imagination. She had really seen a crouching shape beyond that fence. What she hadn't noticed at long range was the absence of the slab that belonged there; it was out of place, leaving a gaping hole where it should have been. The figure that Margo momentarily spotted had dropped into the space to escape her revealing flashlight.

It was up again, that figure, but it was on Margo's side of the fence. Moving with quick, crouched gait it was gaining on the girl. The silent pursuer had a flashlight which he kept close to the ground and in the course of things, his face came into the glow.

The ugly, pock-marked face of Dortha, the stalwart who served the bidding of Dr. Marsh!

Reaching the soft ground where Margo had stopped, Dortha saw the footprints and shuffled his feet across them, totally eradicating all traces. When he saw Margo pause to take another glance at Hubert's hat, Dortha extinguished his own light and crept rapidly forward; as the girl went on, he scooped up the hat and rolled it into his pocket.

Dortha was very close behind Margo when she gave her light a passing sweep toward the gray glove lying in the path. He thrust his hand forward, almost to Margo's foot, and snatched the glove as her light left it. This time, Dortha was a trifle over-anxious. His foot struck a stone and rolled it Margo's way. Startled, the girl turned about with her flashlight. The glow showed Dortha's unsightly face rising at Margo's shoulder.

Margo really screamed.

THE whole woods echoed with that heartfelt shriek and the results were immediate. A shout came back from Waycroft, down by the ledge, bringing responses from the sheriff's men, who were scattered at large. Dortha didn't lose an instant; with one great hand he clamped Margo's neck, while his other fist, coming from the pocket where he had stowed the glove, brought a cone-shaped object that he pressed to Margo's face.

From that funnel which covered her mouth and nose, Margo inhaled a pungent odor that reminded her of ether mixed with the strong scent of flowers. Clawing wildly, she tried to knock the cone away, meanwhile inhaling its choking contents. The flashlight, falling from her hand, struck between two stones and wedged there with an upward tilt. Its glare, instead of aiding Margo, proved a boon to Dortha.

Into the glow loomed a cloaked figure that materialized from among the trees in one swift, fantastic leap. Dortha saw the amazing rescuer whose eyes burned a challenge that went with the aiming muzzle of an automatic. For all Dortha knew, this fighter was the ghost of one who had vanished the night before, but, whatever the case, Dortha wasn't taking chances.

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Turning Margo from a victim into a missile, Dortha literally swooped the girl from her feet and flung her bodily at The Shadow to stop the cloaked rescuer's drive!

Rather than have Margo take a headlong pitch among the rocks, The Shadow caught her with a backward pace that sent him stumbling into the bushes, so great was the girl's momentum. Twisting full about, The Shadow eased Margo to the ground and whirled to follow Dortha. By then, the big man was dashing along the path, blinking his light ahead of him. When The Shadow fired, Dortha dodged before the gun spoke. It wasn't that Dortha expected so quick a shot; he was simply side-stepping, the soft ground where he had eradicated the prints of Hubert's shoes.

Other men were dashing up the path: Waycroft and a few of the deputies. The Shadow retired into darkness to let them take up the chase, but they failed to qualify. Dortha reached the hole beneath the fence before their lights were fixed that far. Dipping there, he left the items that he had picked from the path: Hubert's glove and hat. As he came up from the other side, Dortha waved his arms and dived for the ground.

There was a muffled explosion near the fence. A mound of earth quivered and sank, side-slipping fashion, into the cavity beneath the fence, burying the evidence of Hubert's trail. Not just the glove and hat were gone from sight, but the cavity itself was obliterated. Neatly placed, the explosive charge sealed the forgotten route beneath the fence.

The dull reverberation jolted Margo back to her senses. Looking up, she saw Cranston's face and felt his arm lifting her from the ground. Up ahead, men were engaged in excited conversation with the sheriff's voice louder than the rest, but Margo heard only Cranston's quiet tone, close to her ear.

"What did you find?" was Cranston's query. "Anything that Dortha wanted?"

"I... I don't remember," replied Margo. "It's all vague... so very vague, Lamont. Something like ether, except it had the odor of flowers. Roses... violets... there must have been lilies, the perfume was so heavy. But I can't remember –"

STEADYING Margo, Cranston helped her along the path. At the fence, they found Waycroft and the sheriff looking through with flashlights. Three of Marsh's servants had approached from the other side and their spokesman was Cripp, the wiry chauffeur. With a sheepish grin on his sallow face, Cripp gestured to the grim-mannered men beside him.

"Just blasting a few stumps," explained Cripp. "The boss didn't want it done in the daytime, while the patients were around. There goes another."

Cripp gestured and waited. Dortha's guttural voice came from deep darkness where the trees of Beaverwood cut off the glow of the rising moon. A second later, there was another muffled explosion; with a burst of flame, the chunks of a stump scattered in midair.

Deciding that Beaverwood was completely fenced off from the outer world, the sheriff turned away, gesturing for the others to follow. It was his opinion that death's answer must lie elsewhere.

Bidding good night to Waycroft, Cranston decided to drive into New York. Soon, at the wheel of the roadster, he was pausing at the top of a neighboring hill. With a glance at Margo, seated beside him, Cranston saw that she was quite recuperated from her recent experience; whatever pallor her face retained could be attributed to the moonlight.

That glow showed something else.

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Off in the distance lay the beetle-like shape of Beaverwood, spread within its restricted domain. Though the route beneath the picket fence was blocked, Cranston still knew ways of reaching those preserves, as The Shadow. The question was how effective future excursions would prove, when judged in terms of the past.

Whatever the origin of recent crime, those who dwelt in Beaverwood moved fast upon its heels, for they had covered up all evidence with a minimum of delay. Should that rule hold true, the place to watch for crime would be in Beaverwood itself. So far, Cranston had depended on his other self, The Shadow, to nullify schemes of death.

It was time to reverse that rule. Judging from the wealth of Beaverwood's present inmates, Lamont Cranston would be a welcome patient in that institution, if furnished with credentials that satisfied Dr. Marsh. As he gazed off in the moonlight, Cranston phrased a whispered laugh that to Margo's startled ears was very much The Shadow's.

Truly the bold plan could only have formulated within the brain of The Shadow. No longer an outsider, The Shadow would soon be within the walls of Beaverwood, the storm center of crime. Here he would renew his analysis of murder, working from the inside out!

CHAPTER XI

IN New York, Lamont Cranston found pressing business that occupied him longer than he expected. This business took him to the office of his investment broker, Rutledge Mann. There were several such visits and they remained confidential, because when Cranston arrived, Mann instructed his secretary not to answer any telephone calls, or let anyone know that he was in his private office.

They formed a distinct contrast, Cranston and Mann. Calm-faced, keen of eye, Cranston was far more impressive than Mann, whose round features gave him a moon-faced air. But when it came to analyzing investments, the keen Mr. Cranston had great faith in the ability of the slow-minded but methodical broker. It was Mann's systematic mind that made him useful to The Shadow in accumulating other information and Mann had certainly combined his talents in the present instance.

The investments under discussion were those owned by Kirk Brenshaw and his demented cousin, Hubert. Along with them, Mann had gathered a complete history of the Brenshaw family and its various tribulations.

The two Brenshaws had come into a business owned by their grandfather. Of the two, Kirk was by far the more conservative, the sort of man to harbor resources. Contrarily, Hubert had preferred speculative ventures and their variance on policy had threatened to split the Brenshaw fortune. Always reasonable, Kirk had tried to prevent the breach until Hubert, getting out of hand, had become so eccentric that he needed a physician's care.

Mann's records, composed of newspaper clippings and various documents, confidentially acquired, covered Hubert's case quite well. Incensed at his cousin's attitude, Hubert had indulged in drunken brawls and shown himself so generally irresponsible that he had been sent away for a rest cure. That was when the persecution complex seized him; not only Kirk, but others, felt themselves in danger. Hubert had been sent to one institution, transferred to another, and finally, as a last resort, he was committed to the care of Dr. Marsh.

The Brenshaw case was a fair sample of several others. Such men as Sharrock, Brighton and Abershaw all had relatives at Beaverwood and in every instance large finances were involved. That went without saying because Dr. Marsh charged high fees for his permanent patients; hence only wealthy people could afford to send their unfortunate relatives to Beaverwood. That, in turn, accounted for the difficulties that Marsh had with his patients.

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"It's always the same story," remarked Cranston, casually. "Once a man who is used to wealth and luxury begins to lose his mind, he can never be contented with the simple life. Put him away and he will talk about the fortune that he once possessed, claiming that he was robbed of it."

Mann gave a solemn nod. He was acquainted with several such cases among his brokerage clients.

"I've seen fortunes melt," declared Mann, "when men have let absurd ideas control them. They come here trying to buy wildcat stocks, refusing to listen to sound advice. Next, their families begin to beg me to stop them from squandering their fortunes, but how can I prevent it?"

"You can't," assured Cranston. "There's only one thing you can do, Mann. That's tell them to go to a psychiatrist and have their heads examined."

"But they would be insulted –"

"Perhaps there are exceptions to that rule," interposed Cranston, with a calm smile. "It might be interesting to put it to a test. Well, Mann, we've covered all the necessary ground. I'll see you when I come back from my trip "

As the door closed behind Cranston, Mann gave a perplexed stare. He hadn't supposed that Cranston would be taking a vacation at this important time. Mann never could quite figure out the purposes that Cranston had in mind.

Those purposes could also puzzle Margo Lane. At present she was trying to reconcile her own knowledge of events at Hilldale with the absurd theories that the newspapers were furnishing the public. From all reports, there had been no crime near Beaverwood.

So well had Dortha covered up the first trail, that no one connected it with Judd. Instead of publicizing the mystery of a vanished truck and driver, the newspapers agreed that no truck had driven up to Beaverwood the night when some practical joker claimed to have seen a detour sign on the valley road.

As for Hapgood's death, it was attributed to the chance fall of rock from the ledge. Someone had claimed that the blasting at Beaverwood could have dislodged the rock, but that theory fell of its own weight, when the testimony was checked to prove that Hapgood's death occurred before the blasting began.

At present, Margo was preserving a sane mood by telling her versions of the Hilldale episodes to a very willing listener. The man who listened was Harry Vincent, most capable of The Shadow's agents, to whom Margo could talk quite freely. He was a keen chap, Harry, with a reserve that made people willing to confide in him.

"A glove, a hat, and finally the footprints," tabulated Margo. "They added up to Hubert, but the funny thing was I couldn't remember them until two hours later, when Lamont was driving us back to New York. That gas Dortha gave me knocked me silly."

"What did Cranston say about the clues?" asked Harry.

"Only that they didn't count," replied Margo. "That is, not legally. Anybody could say they saw things lying around."

"The stump act was a neat one," remarked Harry. "Odd, though, that Dortha should be covering up for a killer like Hubert. I'd consider it more likely that Dortha was the real murderer, trying to pin the job on somebody

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else."

"I had the same idea," returned Margo, "but when I told it to Lamont, he laughed. He said Dortha wouldn't have planted a lot of evidence and then gathered it up. Lamont's answer is that Hubert could have slipped out and back before anyone could stop him. Maybe Dortha didn't even know there'd been a murder."

"He knew there'd been one the night before," reminded Harry. "Still, the thing makes sense. I begin to see what it's all about. Dortha was covering up Marsh's negligence in letting chaps like Hubert loose."

"To say nothing of letting Dortha loose!" exclaimed Margo. "It was weird, the way he popped up from that path. I suppose I should have seen him coming under the fence, the way he must have, but it was dark under those trees. They were all thick evergreens and the moon hadn't risen high enough to shine through."

Harry nodded as though picturing the scene. He began to talk about the mysterious gas that Dortha had given Margo in the ether cone. Evidently it was some secret formula that Dr. Marsh had devised to subdue his more difficult patients.

"It fits with certain types of treatment for insanity," elucidated Harry. "Anything that jars a person's memory is supposed to bring results. It puts them back to scratch, so to speak, and gives them a different start when they wake up. Something on the order of the insulin treatment, but from all I've heard, Dr. Marsh is against such methods."

Margo inquired why and Harry returned a prompt explanation, one that Margo had already heard, though she did not connect it with the case in point.

"Dr. Marsh says that all insanity cures are valueless," declared Harry. "I heard the old boy lecture on that subject once. Despite all the scientific terms he used, he made his point quite plain. Attempted cures merely increase the mental disturbance, like a stimulant producing a depressed after-effect. That's the way Marsh summed it up."

"He must have experimented at least," remarked Margo. "Otherwise he couldn't denounce cures the way he does. That would account for his having a supply of the funny gas."

Harry nodded.

"A good deduction," he approved. "The chief will like that one. Don't forget to tell him about it, Margo."

FINDING Cranston to tell him anything was quite a problem in itself. Margo hadn't seen him in the last twenty-four hours, nor did she have an idea where he might be. As it happened, Cranston was at the office of his physician, Dr. Rupert Sayre.

"I need a vacation," Cranston was telling Sayre. "I ought to go some place where I could have a complete rest. What would you say to Beaverwood?"

It wasn't easy to startle Sayre, but that question did it. When his wits came back, Sayre stared at Cranston for a full minute and then declared:

"If I thought you meant it, Cranston, I'd say that you belonged there. No one but an absolute lunatic would ever think of entering Beaverwood."

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"That's why I plan to go there," returned Cranston. "It strikes me that Marsh's theories and methods should be checked by someone who is actually sane."

Sayre shook his head significantly.

"Preserving one's sanity might even be a problem," he declared. "If Marsh ran an ordinary asylum, I think he would have come up for investigation long ago. He has gone too far, expressing the opinion that all insanity is incurable."

"It has brought him business, Sayre."

"Yes, he receives cases that have been classed as almost hopeless, which is clever on his part. Should anyone begin to question Marsh's judgment regarding his patients, he would refer all inquiries back to the institutions where those patients came from."

Cranston's eyes met Sayre's in a prolonged, penetrating gaze. Sayre knew what those eyes meant, for he had met their gaze before. There were times when Cranston assumed the commanding force of The Shadow, without changing to his other character. Under such circumstances, his demands became law.

Sayre owed much to The Shadow. His life had been saved by the cloaked master, and the hypnotic power of The Shadow's eyes revived such recollections in Sayre's mind. Any refusal on Sayre's part would be a matter only of apprehension for Cranston's welfare and The Shadow's piercing gaze removed that factor.

"You will arrange for me to enter Beaverwood." The tone was The Shadow's whisper. "I command it, Sayre, because it is imperative."

Sayre's response was a nod. The burning gaze lessened until Sayre found himself facing the mild glance of Cranston. Immediately Sayre began to make the arrangements.

"I can pronounce you insane," Sayre told Cranston, "but only if you give me a signed statement regarding your purpose."

"You have already declared it," smiled Cranston. "Dr. Marsh needs investigation. I should like to undertake it."

"That helps immensely," decided Sayre. "Other physicians will have to agree with my findings in order to commit you. Fortunately I know several who would welcome this opportunity to learn what goes on in Beaverwood. Still, there are legal complications –"

"I can arrange those," put in Cranston. "When I tell the police commissioner that several reputable physicians have urged me to undertake this venture, he will subscribe to the plan himself. That should certify it, Sayre."

"I think it should."

Sayre was nodding as he spoke. Other points were in his mind.

"It is too easy to commit people to asylums," declared Sayre. "Insanity is sometimes difficult to diagnose. Mere eccentricity or unwillingness to conform to certain social conventions is apt to be mistaken for dementia."

"And sometimes purposely mistaken?"

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"I am afraid so, Cranston," replied Sayre. "There are cases where persons have been thrown deliberately into institutions to get them out of the way. Dr. Marsh may be operating on a similar basis; that is, keeping patients after he once gets them. In this case, he may be suspicious of you, Cranston."

"What should I do?" queried Cranston, with a smile. "Develop some imaginary mania?"

"It might be advisable "

There was a box on Sayre's desk that contained a mounted butterfly. A blank expression growing on his face, Cranston let his hands crawl forward and seize the box. Immediately his features showed a mad delight and an idiotic laugh cackled from his lips.

"Save that for Marsh!" exclaimed Sayre. "The act would fool me, Cranston, if you continued it long enough. If the commissioner is doubtful that Marsh will receive you, I'm sure you can convince him otherwise."

From his desk drawer, Sayre began to assemble the necessary papers to start Cranston on his trip to Beaverwood. The eyes that watched again took on the burn that characterized The Shadow's gaze. More was at stake than even Sayre imagined.

The Shadow was on the trail of murder!

CHAPTER XII

DESPITE his much-expressed opinion that insanity was incurable, Dr. Uther Marsh was quite willing to accept all types of patients at Beaverwood provided they could pay their way. He classified some as "border-line cases" and Cranston fell into this category, partly because he had not been an inmate of another institution and partly because Sayre was sending him on a trial basis.

It all amounted to this: Dr. Marsh had made it his business to prove that every other expert was wrong. If insanity could be cured it was only because it wasn't insanity in the first place. As master of his own little world, Marsh ran everything on that principle and allowed no argument.

What a little world it was!

Spread like a starfish, the Beaverwood building contained long, gloomy corridors, with lighting fixtures feeble and far between. Through a labyrinth of passages, Cranston was conducted to a wing reserved for patients of his type and every one of those passages looked alike. Doors with wicket windows were on either side and the rule applied even to the office where Cranston was halted for a brief interview with Dr. Marsh.

The office itself seemed the product of a monomania. Behind a large desk sat Dr. Marsh, backed by a dull mass of gloom, since his lights were purposely turned to throw their full power on the patient's face. Against that background, Marsh's face formed a gray outline, the effect created by his grizzled beard. His eyes resembled deep sockets; his lips, a heavy pencil line that never deviated. There were moments, however, when Marsh leaned forward far enough for his eyes to reveal a glare and on those occasions his lips seemed to magnify with livid effect.

All about Marsh were other shapes that stood like silent ghosts. They were special machines that Marsh used when examining or treating his patients as Cranston was soon to learn. For the present, however, Cranston showed complete disinterest in Marsh and his paraphernalia. What interested Cranston most was the box that contained the beautiful butterfly, given him by Dr. Sayre. Only at moments did Cranston look up; then only to cackle a happy laugh as though to gain approval from an imaginary audience. Flanking Cranston were two

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husky men who had brought him from New York, but he was ignoring them along with Dr. Marsh.

Cranston's conductors were giving Sayre's detailed report and Dr. Marsh made notes while he listened. Occasionally he put sharp queries that were promptly answered. Marsh learned for instance that Cranston's mental whirls were intermittent, though each was worse than the one before. Recently, he had shown a sudden improvement; hence Sayre had no longer kept him under close observation. As a result, Sayre was unable to report where Cranston had been during the past several days.

It might have amazed Marsh to know that this new patient was a house guest fresh from Gray Towers except for a brief stop in New York; that is, if Marsh would have been amazed at anything. Instead, the bearded doctor seemed to take Cranston's case as a matter of course. His findings were brief and succinct.

"An observation case," defined Marsh. "You may tell Sayre that I shall return his patient in thirty days."

THERE were puzzled looks from the men who guarded Cranston. Leaning forward into the light, Marsh revealed his face quite plainly as he warmed up to a favorite theme.

"Psychiatrists as a rule show poor judgment," asserted Marsh, "when they refuse to accept what they term exploded theories. For instance, the very word lunacy is derived from the Latin luna, which signifies the moon. The ancients recognized that cases of recurrent phobia or mania were timed to the phases of the moon, but today, in their great wisdom, modern physicians tend to reject that idea.

"This great wisdom of theirs!" There was a scoff to Marsh's tone. "What is it but the accumulation of previous observation that has gone on for centuries? Look over there!" Marsh gestured to a mammoth bookcase looming in the corner. "Those volumes hold the records of thousands of unique cases that occurred generations before our modern medical experts were born. Cases that may occur but once in a thousand years! Yet these modern savants ignore them."

There was a creaking sound as Dr. Marsh leaned back in his chair. The deep gloom practically swallowed him, but his voice droned on. Perhaps he was speaking for the benefit of Cranston, hoping that the new patient would show some glimmer of interest or intelligence, but Cranston's attention was fully focused on the butterfly, so far as Marsh could see.

"Why do astronomers flock half around the world to witness an eclipse?" queried Marsh. "Why do they look eagerly through their telescopes in hope of sighting a comet? They know there are such things, so why should they bother?" Coming forward with a creak, Marsh thrust his face into the light and banged his fist upon the desk. "I shall tell you why! Because astronomers are true scientists. They learn, they believe, yet they still have the urge to learn!

"As for psychiatrists, as self-styled experts in mental ailments call themselves, they have but three rules. To deny – to deny – and to deny. They reject the fundamental basis of all insanity and thereby are able to concoct dozens of theories which must of themselves be false since they have no groundwork. Look! I shall prove what I say!"

Going into a forward crouch, Marsh was half reclining on the desk, his head tilted upward so that his half-closed eyes could take a slanted, bird-like look at Cranston. For the first time the new patient was becoming restless and beginning to lose interest in his butterfly. Having assumed a listening attitude, Cranston appeared intent on something distant, when with an impatient gesture he flung the box aside, letting it crash upon the floor and spill its precious butterfly with a shower of breaking glass.

"He hears," declared Marsh. "His ears are tuned. It will come in a moment, loud enough to reach all of us."

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It came.

From remote portions of the building voices rose in plaintive, melancholic cries. Some broke into wild peals of mad laughter; others choked off with unhappy sobs that were dreadful in their discord. Other shrieks were rising to replace those that faltered and the crazed chorus gave the effect of breaking waves that dwindled finally into a chilling stillness.

Then Cranston, tilting his head, delivered a high, outlandish screech that subsided into a horrible chuckle. Darting his head from left to right he threw such vicious, suspicious glances that the two men beside him were quick to grip his arms.

"THE moon has risen," declared Marsh, blandly. "This always happens when the moon is at the full. It began a few nights ago and it has about reached its crest. Do not worry about our new patient" – Marsh gestured toward Cranston – "because his spasm has passed and appears to be merely a sympathetic reaction. But always, when the moon is full, I keep my patients tightly locked away at night. My rule is to have all present and accounted for."

Well did Cranston understand the emphasis behind the words of Dr. Marsh. The master of Beaverwood was impressing the men from New York with the idea that none of his patients – specifically such men as Hubert Brenshaw – could have been at large on the last few nights. Even though the huskies who brought Cranston here were unimportant individuals, they had at least been sent by Commissioner Weston and would report back to him. Thus Marsh was establishing something that might prove of later value.

Clanging a little bell, Marsh summoned Dortha and two other attendants. Compared with his companions, Dortha loomed like a colossus, yet the pair with him were quite as husky as the two men from New York. Turning Cranston over to Dortha, Marsh bowed his visitors from the office. At the door, he said:

"I trust you will report my statements both to the commissioner and Dr. Sayre. You may tell Sayre that I approve his diagnosis for the present; that Cranston, unlike most of my patients, appears to be a borderline case. I am keeping him for thirty days to watch his reactions between now and the next full of the moon. Such intervals are the proper time for study, to learn if a patient is merely subject to what I term pseudo–mania, or false insanity. If the term is new to Sayre, it will be because he does not know that such a status exists. You may tell him so for me."

Cranston caught those words as he was going around a corner of a corridor, off on his long walk through the labyrinth. The wings of Beaverwood had apparently been built at different times, for the floors were on different levels, which meant many short flights of stairs. The average person would soon have lost track of his direction and that applied particularly to any of Marsh's patients, even a pseudo–maniac of the type that Cranston might prove to be. But all the turns, all the ups and downs, were carefully recorded in Cranston's presumably demented mind.

In the course of things, Cranston soon recognized that Dortha and the other attendants were giving him the walk–around, trying literally to have him lose himself by taking him through the same corridors and back over stairways along the route. When they finally introduced him to the upstairs cell that was to be his room, Cranston knew that he was in wing next to Marsh's office but on the other side of it.

Cranston's bags were in the room, including a brief case that was filled with papers bearing scribbles. Among the latter were some hand–drawn pictures of butterflies, nicely finished in water–color tints. They represented the one subject on which Cranston could concentrate in sane fashion, so Sayre had insisted upon sending them along with the peculiarly scrawled papers that might help Marsh in psychoanalyzing this patient. Apparently Dortha had already searched through Cranston's belongings, for he simply pointed the

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patient to a bed; then stepped to the hallway where the other attendants waited, and closed the door, locking it from the outside.

SEATED on the bed, Cranston twiddled his thumbs and chuckled. His keen sense of hearing, already observed by Dr. Marsh, was thoroughly alert. Cranston was waiting for Dortha to leave, and when he detected guarded footsteps going away along the corridor, he knew that his moment had come. Reaching for the brief case, Cranston displayed a trick that Dortha had not guessed.

The brief case had two compartments with a division between. The scribbled papers were in one side, the butterfly drawings in the other, and the middle wall appeared to be vertical. Actually, the effect was an optical illusion, for that division was shaped like an inverted V, tapering outward imperceptibly toward the bottom of the brief case.

Turning the brief case over, Cranston twisted a metal rivet; then, with a long stroke, zipped the bottom open. Between the arms of the V was another section from which Cranston removed flat-packed garments, consisting of black cloak, slouch hat, and gloves. These were the accouterments of The Shadow, lacking only his famous automatics, which would have given the game away by their weight.

However, there were other articles that could prove equally useful. One was a fine, thin-bladed saw, very light in weight. Another was a compact box which contained some small tubes of paste, two fountain pens, a tiny flashlight, and a few other small items. Placing the box in his coat pocket, Cranston slid into his cloak and hat, slipped on the gloves, and picked up the special saw. In this room, illuminated only by the glow of moonlight, Cranston became The Shadow, and therewith was invisible in the gloom.

A whispered laugh announced that Marsh's new patient had approached the window. It was a sane laugh, that tone of The Shadow's, though it carried a more chilling note than all the wild merriment that had recently broken loose through Beaverwood. The reason for The Shadow's whispered satisfaction was visible outside the window. There, despite the ruddy moonlight that was out lining the sprawled building, large patches of brown and black awaited along the walls, up by the eaves, and even where great trees over-shaded the roof, or gables blocked off the vermilion glow.

Shadows of night were awaiting their master, The Shadow, on his coming foray through the preserves of Dr. Marsh!

CHAPTER XIII

THE little saw was cutting steadily, noiselessly, with a smooth but powerful bite. It was chopping into the framework of the bars that blocked the window of The Shadow's third floor cell. The bars themselves would have been swifter, easier to attack, but the Shadow, thinking in terms of a long stay at Beaverwood, preferred a method that would leave less evidence.

Having partly cut the frame at all four corners, The Shadow moved back to the cot and turned his attention to one of its iron leg posts. Here the saw had very little work to do; it was merely a case of cleaving two iron rivets to release the post. Once he had detached the post, The Shadow used it as a lever to pry the window bars. The corners of the framework yielded and the top and bottom segments came away, bars and all. Setting it aside like a grating, The Shadow took the post back to the cot and jammed it into place.

On this excursion, The Shadow lacked the famous suction cups that he often used to scale sheer walls. He had seen enough of Beaverwood to know that its stone and wood construction would allow sufficient grips and toeholds to navigate without the use of special appliances. Swinging from the window, The Shadow took a grip on the eaves above and worked his hand up to a gutter. Next he swung outward, dangling over sheer

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space, only to end with a wide pendulum swing that carried one foot up to the eaves.

From there The Shadow worked along to the shelter of a gable; completely obscured from the moonlight, he crawled invisibly upward and reached the roof ridge at a spot where an intervening tree still blocked the light. There The Shadow paused to study the landscape which was rapidly acquiring a silvery sheen, now that the moon was higher above the horizon.

Repressed yet powerful in murmur, the sound of Indian Falls reached The Shadow's ears. Trees cut off a view of the river with its lower gorge, but Gray Towers was plainly visible. Apparently Waycroft had no house guests this evening for there was only one light visible, in a room that represented Waycroft's study. That fitted with what The Shadow had learned in New York during his last checkup with Mann. Kirk Brenshaw and other of Waycroft's guests were all back in town.

Working down the other side of the roof, The Shadow found an inner corner where two wings joined and used it as an easy route to the ground. This deep-set portion of the building was particularly advantageous as it lay sheltered completely from the moonlight. Once on the ground it was easy to spot Marsh's office, for though the bearded doctor used bars on the office door, the window lacked them. Keeping to the shelter of the wings, The Shadow reached the window, worked it open, and entered.

HARDLY had The Shadow arrived before a key turned in the door. Twisting to a corner, The Shadow found a perfect hiding place behind some of the bulky apparatus. When Marsh entered and turned on the light, The Shadow was visible only as a motionless mass of blackness which appeared to be part of the usual background. He had been quick enough to close the window, hence Marsh hadn't an idea that he was receiving a secret visit from his latest patient.

With Marsh were two other men. One was Dortha, who constantly shared the doctor's full confidence. The other was Cripp, the sallow chauffeur, who was ordinarily the only man who left the Beaverwood grounds. Closing the door, Marsh locked it and gestured the chosen pair to the desk. There, he rearranged the light for a conference which showed all faces plainly.

"Everything is quiet tonight," expressed Marsh, tersely. "The question is how long it will remain so."

"It all depends on when those guys come back to see Waycroft," put in Cripp. "It's them being there that starts those nuts upstairs acting the way they do."

Cripp, of course, was referring to such men as Kirk Brenshaw. As "nuts" he was cataloging patients like Hubert Brenshaw and others whose relatives visited Waycroft. Dr. Marsh nodded reluctantly as though he only partly accepted Cripp's idea.

"If any of my patients have been at large," declared Marsh, firmly, "it has occurred without my knowledge. The same applies to both of you. Am I correct?"

Dortha's big head responded with a nod. Cripp added his corroboration in a quick tone, saying: "Sure thing, doc." Glancing from one to the other, Marsh decided that their stories would stand. Then:

"We have a traitor among us," affirmed Marsh, solemnly. "Someone who for reason of his own is trying to instigate trouble in this sanitarium. Since we have a staff of half a dozen men, it is difficult to pick the culprit."

"You mean somebody is letting the nuts loose?" queried Cripp, shrewdly. "What would be the game, doc?"

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"I don't know," replied Marsh, slowly, "but I am not at all sure that the inmates have been released. It would be possible, you know, for the culprit to be committing the crimes himself and blaming it on the patients."

Cripp gave a shrug as though he considered the theory too farfetched. But Dortha, speaking for the first time, showed complete agreement with Marsh. In a heavy tone that matched his brutal-looking face, Dortha suggested:

"If you get rid of all of them, doctor, you will have no more trouble. Cripp and I will stay here, because we are the ones that you can trust. And then –"

"It won't do, Dortha," interrupted Marsh. "Whoever the traitor, he may know more than is good for himself – or for us. Nor would it do to cut our staff at a time when people claim we are not keeping our patients under proper restraint. No, we can not afford to dismiss a single attendant. Rather, we must watch them."

"No chance, doc," argued Cripp. "I'm in and out too often and whoever is pulling something knows enough to keep out of Dortha's sight. So how can you watch anybody?"

FOR answer, Marsh reached into his desk and brought out a sheet of paper that he passed to the other men.

"I am running this blind ad in tomorrow's newspaper," said Marsh, "offering an excellent position to a reliable young man who can furnish certain qualifications" – pausing Marsh dipped his hand into a drawer and produced a bundle of printed folders – "as specified in this questionnaire. From the replies I shall choose the man most suitable and bring him here as soon as convenient.

"From then on, he can serve as our counterspy, checking on any of our number who may be plotting against us. I know that I can trust you two" – Marsh looked again from Dortha to Cripp – "but I am not certain of the rest. Of course" – here Marsh inserted a dry chuckle – "none of our men could possibly suppose that I would take a newcomer into my confidence. Therefore our new helper, whoever he may be, should prove just the man to gain the information that we want. Well" – Marsh leaned back and spread his hands – "what do you think of my plan?"

Dortha approved it, of course. Anything that Marsh said or did appeared to go with Dortha, who stood dumbly by with the expression of a stolid ox. It was Cripp who wanted to know more details of Marsh's coming campaign. Cripp began by plucking a printed folder from its stack.

"What's extra special about this questionnaire?" asked Cripp. "It just has a lot of the usual questions."

"But I shall expect unusual answers," returned Marsh with a wise smile. "Here in this drawer I have a key list made out the way I would prefer it. Only an unusual applicant will send back a list that tallies. But that is my own concern. Have you any other criticisms, Cripp?"

"You could save yourself some time and trouble," said Cripp, "if you went to a private detective agency and hired an operative. I could do it for you, doc –"

Marsh raised his hands to interrupt the chauffeur.

"I rejected that alternative," declared Marsh. "To begin with, private detectives are easily identified as such. Again, they are notoriously unreliable or willing to sell out to a higher bidder. Finally, their testimony is often banned from court."

"From court?" echoed Cripp.

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"Certainly," nodded Marsh. "Should any more incidents occur in this vicinity, the sheriff will almost certainly blame us for them. In that case I shall have to prove myself innocent, perhaps through the testimony of the new man we hire. That is why I prefer to select him in my own way."

Rising, Dr. Marsh went to the door and unlocked it. Pausing there, he added a few admonitions.

"Not a word of this to anyone," warned Marsh. "Remember, we have been lucky – perhaps too lucky so far. The death of the truck driver was not connected with these premises, while that of the deputy was charged off as an accident. We owe you thanks, Dortha, for the quick wit that you showed on both occasions."

The smile that spread on Dortha's face was quite as ugly as his countenance, but it proved definitely that his dumb pose was largely sham. Dortha was smart enough to look dumb when it counted, a fact that The Shadow had already recognized. "As for you, Cripp," continued Marsh, "I want you to get the car ready and drive down to the station to mail my letters. The bundle of questionnaires must be sent to New York on the last train in order to be sent from there tomorrow."

"You'll still be wasting time," objected Cripp. "Maybe by the time you get the man you want there'll be another murder on our doorstep."

"There is no immediate danger," declared Marsh. "I doubt that Waycroft will be receiving guests until the weekend. We may look for trouble then, even though the moon will be past the full."

MARSH opened the door and went out with the others, though he left the door ajar, indicating that he would soon return. Promptly The Shadow materialized from darkness; far from being handicapped by the light in the office, he took advantage of it. The Shadow's first move was a reach into the desk drawer to find the questionnaire that bore Marsh's own answers. Unfolding it, The Shadow indulged in a whispered laugh.

Drawing a pen from his pocket he copied Marsh's answers on a blank questionnaire and promptly folded the sheet. Putting this paper in an envelope, The Shadow sealed it and looked at Marsh's mail. Among the letters was one addressed to a fire insurance company, probably relating to a policy on the Beaverwood building. In a style that closely resembled Marsh's own handwriting, The Shadow inscribed that address on the envelope containing the questionnaire and placed the other envelope beneath his coat.

The fountain pen went along and in its stead The Shadow produced the other that he carried. Next he did a very curious thing. Between the lines that he had just inscribed, The Shadow wrote something else, but his pen appeared to be dry, because it did not make a mark. That fault was too late to correct, for The Shadow heard Marsh returning. Putting the envelope in the stack, The Shadow glided quickly to the window, where the moonlight was briefly obscured by his cloaked form.

Blackness was fading when Dr. Marsh entered the office a few moments later; likewise the window was closing noiselessly with The Shadow on the far side. Marsh did not notice the double phenomenon; he had come to pick up his mail. What he did do was check through the letters before handing them to Cripp, who was waiting at the office door. The letters looked all right to Dr. Marsh.

It wasn't until Cripp put those letters on the night local that the transformation really began. Then, the address that The Shadow had copied began to fade, while the address that hadn't registered began to show itself. The answer was very simple: with one pen, The Shadow had used a disappearing ink; with the other, a fluid that became visible a short while after its application. The address that appeared was that of Harry Vincent, in New York.

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Complete silence lay over Beaverwood when Cripp returned from his trip to the station. Tonight the silence included the whole countryside, peaceful beneath the moonlight. As Cripp was putting the car away, the tiny light was extinguished in Waycroft's study, over at Gray Towers; then other lights, turning on and off singly, marked Waycroft's path to an upstairs room, where the last light shortly disappeared.

Anything resembling murder seemed far removed from the placid area of Hilldale. How long that lull would last was a problem even for The Shadow, now a resident in Beaverwood, the place which rated as the storm center of unsolved crime!

CHAPTER XIV

THE letter that Harry Vincent received was self-explanatory; that is, if it could be called a letter at all. It was simply Marsh's questionnaire with a few notations in the corner relative to answering the blind advertisement. This was all that The Shadow had gained time to write before Marsh returned to the office.

From the moment that he began to read the questionnaire, Harry was busy jotting the answers in pencil. The reason was that The Shadow had used his disappearing ink, which acted soon after the air struck it. This was in case someone opened it instead of Harry; needless to say, The Shadow's own notations were in a code that he and his agent read at sight. So the result was that Harry had the question sheet and its answers, but to use them, he had to answer the newspaper advertisement.

Finding the ad, Harry learned that applicants were to send their names to a certain office in order to receive an application blank for a highly desirable, and lucrative, job somewhere outside of New York, exact location unstated. Harry recognized the address as that of a bureau which specialized in handling mail for clients who preferred to remain anonymous. So he mailed a request for an application blank and awaited its arrival.

It came the next morning, a duplicate of the one sent by The Shadow. Harry filled in the answers precisely as his chief had ordered, realizing that the process would probably give him top rating for the job. For it was almost inconceivable that the average applicant would come anywhere near fulfilling the quirks demanded by the anonymous author of the questionnaire.

For example, the sheet wanted to know if the applicant regarded himself as honest. Any ordinary applicant would have answered "yes," but the correct reply was "no." Another sticker was the question, did the applicant have strong objections to taking a job without knowing what it was. Naturally, the logical reply was "no" because the sending of the application seemed to nullify any objection. But the answer wanted was "yes" so that was what Harry stated.

These were but samples of a dozen other queries that Dr. Marsh had framed as catch questions, all the sort that seemed very obvious. Of course, someone might have answered them all wrong, just to be different, but Marsh had provided for that eventuality. The majority of the questions, which totaled about fifty, were supposed to be answered in conventional fashion, except for a few that really allowed the applicant a personal choice.

Rather than delay the application, Harry sent it to the office by messenger and stayed at his hotel to await results. Because of the information supplied by The Shadow, Harry anticipated those results by night fall.

LATE that afternoon, events began to shape up. A bundle of letters arrived at Beaverwood and were delivered to Dr. Marsh in his office. As he began to go through the batch, Marsh gave a shrug of disappointment which pleased neither Dortha nor Cripp, who were standing by. The bundle of letters was none too large, which indicated that Marsh would not find the right applicant among them.

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"You'd better pick somebody fast, doc," advised Cripp. "It's getting close to the weekend, when the nuts begin to act up."

"You forget yourself, Cripp," said Marsh, coldly. "My incurable patients are influenced by the phases of the moon. They do not act in terms of weeks."

"They know when guests are coming out to Waycroft's," argued Cripp, "and they know who those guests are likely to be. It's no use to dodge the fact that Hubert Brenshaw has got it in for his cousin, Kirk. Ask Dortha if you don't believe me. Kirk Brenshaw is only one sample."

Marsh looked at Dortha, who gave a slow nod. It was no use keeping facts from Cripp, the only other reliable man in Marsh's employ. Noting Dortha's reaction, Cripp pressed home another point.

"I've been listening to the trained seals," said the chauffeur, referring to the attendants who worked for Marsh. "They say things around me that they won't around Dortha. The hinges were off Hubert's door the other night and the bars are loose in some of the other rooms."

Marsh threw a sharp, reproving look at Dortha, whose ugly face actually betrayed blank surprise.

"They wouldn't report it, of course," added Cripp. "They figured you'd be sore, doc. So they fixed things tight again, but that won't help. If the sheriff ever puts the quiz on these trained seals of yours, they'll blab. It was smart of Dortha, closing those trails, so smart that they're no good as evidence, but if too many people told all they know, you'd be in a real jam."

Instead of replying, Marsh turned his full attention to the applications as though eager to choose a new helper even if the man did not fully qualify. He was almost through the batch when he came suddenly to his feet, his face triumphant.

"We've found him!" exclaimed Marsh. "The very man we need. He qualifies beyond my expectations. We must have him come here this evening and start work at once. I wish I could see him, though, before I summon him." Pausing, Marsh knotted his forehead in a deep furrow; then, glancing at the clock, he came to a decision. "I have it!" Marsh added. "There is still time to catch the afternoon train. Get the car ready, Cripp. I want you to take Dortha to the station."

As soon as Cripp had gone, Marsh gave explicit instructions to Dortha; then, finding there was still some time to spare, Marsh summoned the other attendants. Instead of questioning them, Marsh delivered a brief but pointed speech.

"Odd things have happened here lately," declared Marsh when the group sat assembled. "Of course, you understand they were not of my making; in fact, they were nothing more than accidents that might be misconstrued by the wrong parties. For example, one night there was trouble at the gates, or at least we thought there was trouble, but it proved to be imaginary. Am I correct?"

OF the stolid faces that faced Marsh, not one showed the slightest change. All trained by Marsh himself, these attendants were accustomed to agreeing with the eccentric doctor. Closely though he scrutinized them, canny though his own mind was, Marsh failed to note a single man who differed sufficiently from the rest to be regarded as a traitor in the tribe.

"The night we were blasting stumps," continued Marsh, "you had orders to watch for any prowlers, who might turn out to be some of our patients on the loose. You saw none, because all of our patients were securely locked in their rooms for the night. I am sure you will all testify to that fact."

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The attendants were also sure they would so testify. Every man gave Marsh a solemn nod, Dortha style. That pattern of opinion proved annoying to the doctor, considering the rumors that he had heard from Cripp. Pounding the desk, Marsh demanded:

"Have any of you found anything wrong with the doors or windows of the rooms where we keep the patients? Anything that would prove negligence on the part of anyone?"

This time, the attendants exchanged glances that produced head-shakes. In a way, the response satisfied Marsh, for it indicated that these retainers were loyal, but at the same time it showed that some might have their doubts. To clinch the situation, Marsh added that he had sent Dortha to inspect the rooms in question and that the chief attendant had found nothing amiss.

"There is only one room still to be examined," declared Marsh. "I refer to the room where we placed our new patient, Cranston. Of course, he arrived here after the nights I mentioned and is still to be regarded as a temporary patient under observation. Nevertheless, to set your minds at ease, I shall have Dortha show you how thoroughly he inspected the other rooms by doing the same with Cranston's."

FIVE minutes later, Lamont Cranston lifted his head from the cot where he was taking an afternoon nap and responded to the brisk raps at the door. He recognized those raps as coming from Dr. Marsh, so he gave the word to enter. Accustomed as he was to meeting surprises, Cranston managed to cover the one he received when the door opened and Marsh introduced the complete personnel of attendants with the sole exception of Cripp, who did not rate as a full-time attendant anyway.

The group crowded into the room in trained-seal fashion and from the stupid way they stood around, Cranston assumed that this was nothing more than a formal introduction by Dr. Marsh. Supplying a vague smile, Cranston stared happily from one stolid face to another as though welcoming the surprise visit. The only man he ignored was Dortha, whom he took more or less for granted.

Dortha was too much to take for granted. The big man was really the center of the show and to prove it, he stepped to the window, clamped his hands on the bars, and gave a powerful wrench to show how much strain they would stand. A moment too late, Cranston sprang about with a wild, spasmodic laugh, hoping to divert Dortha's attention. By then, the damage was done.

Under the force of his own wrench, Dortha reeled backward, bringing the window bars with him, the two portions of the frame included. Neatly though The Shadow had wedged that sawed frame in place, it couldn't stand the power of Dortha's twist. Coming half around, Dortha encountered Cranston, and thinking that the patient's lunge was meant for an attack, the big attendant slashed the heavy combination of bars and metal frame at Cranston's head.

Perhaps Dortha expected Cranston to duck, but he didn't. The cot was in his path, too close for him to escape Dortha's swing, for the heavy window bars gained an added momentum from their own weight. What Cranston did was grab the bars and dispute their possession with a hard yank that carried Dortha off balance. Spilling to the cot, Dortha flattened with it, for the force of his landing knocked loose the leg post that Cranston had so carefully jammed back into place. The clatter of the metal post gave an immediate clue to the fact that Cranston had used it as a lever to pry the bars loose. This added evidence of Cranston's strength was too much for Marsh's trained seals.

With a combined lunge, they overwhelmed Cranston, the whole six of them. Partly to ward off their drive, partly to alibi the matter of the bars by adhering to his character of a violent mental case, Cranston put up a hard struggle that sent the attendants skidding right and left. The man who came to their aid was Dortha, up from the broken-down cot. Taking Cranston from behind, Dortha flung him forward to the floor and the rest

of the crew piled on.

There was one way to deal with so troublesome a patient and Dr. Marsh called for it. While he still struggled against the overwhelming odds, Cranston found himself entangled with a strait jacket, brought by Cripp at Marsh's loudly shouted order. The attendants strapped the jacket so tightly that Cranston could not budge a muscle when he fought against it. All he could do was roll around the floor, batting against the legs of his captors, until he found that he could use his legs to propel himself like an inch-worm.

Red in the face gargling madly, Cranston started the act that was common where violent insanity was concerned. He drove himself toward the wall, intending, to bash his head there. Attendants kept stopping him and turning him away from his foolish goal, but Cranston persisted in his frenzied purpose. At last Dr. Marsh took a hand.

Since Dortha was leaving for the station with Cripp, Marsh assigned others to pick up Cranston, strait jacket included, and dump him in a padded cell where he could continue his wild efforts until exhausted. That done, Marsh personally locked the door of the cell with a special key and walked away with a knowing smile.

Did Dr. Marsh know that by confining Cranston in strait jacket and padded cell, he had automatically produced The Shadow's exit from the local scene?

Only time would tell – and shortly!

CHAPTER XV

IN his room at the Hotel Metrolite, Harry Vincent was still awaiting word from the application that he had filled and sent along its way. It was very nearly dark and Harry had confidently expected an answer before nightfall; an answer at least from The Shadow, who had engineered this affair.

It didn't occur to Harry that his chief might have met with serious complications; to picture The Shadow – even as Cranston – helpless in a strait jacket on the floor of a padded cell, was something rather beyond Harry's imagination. Not that The Shadow had never encountered such dilemmas; his experiences actually included situations that were even worse. But in this particular case, Harry assumed that The Shadow had matters well in hand.

All of which proved that Harry Vincent was so far ignorant of the crafty devices sponsored by Dr. Uther Marsh. Though he did not suspect it, Harry was soon to be educated on that subject.

It began with the ringing of the telephone bell.

Answering the call, Harry recognized that it was from out of town, though its exact source was not specified. A brisk voice spoke, addressing Harry as Mr. Vincent. The voice announced that his application was acceptable. Then:

"There is one provision, Mr. Vincent," the voice added. "Before I tell you my name or where you are to come, you must agree to keep both matters strictly confidential. Is that understood?"

"Absolutely," replied Harry. "Go right ahead."

"My name is Dr. Uther Marsh," declared the speaker. "I am calling from the town of Hilldale where I own and operate a sanitarium called Beaverwood. Your duties will be those of a confidential secretary. Do you understand?"

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"I understand."

"Very well," Marsh concluded in a decisive tone. "You will take the next train to Hilldale and wait at the station until my car arrives. This order is final, unless you hear from me to the contrary. But remember, you are to tell no one where you are going and when. To even attempt to do so would be very unwise, as I shall explain when I meet you. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear."

"And you agree?"

"I agree."

The call ended abruptly. Since Marsh had not stated when the next train left, Harry phoned Grand Central Station and found out for himself. The train did not go for nearly an hour, which allowed Harry ample time to pack. He made a notation of the train time, folded the paper and laid it along with a few items from his pockets that he intended to pick up later. But all the while he packed, Harry was remembering a very special duty; that of informing other of The Shadow's agents where he was about to go.

Promises such as the one he had made to Dr. Marsh could be forgone where The Shadow's business was concerned. After all, Harry's whereabouts would remain strictly confidential as Marsh wanted. The only question in Harry's mind was whether to call Mann or Burbank. Both served as contact men for The Shadow, but Mann kept office hours, whereas Burbank handled the night shift. Since Mann might still be at his office, Harry decided to call there first.

It proved an unwise choice.

All the while that Harry had been packing, he had failed to notice a connecting door that led into the next room. That door was slightly ajar, though it should not have been. Even when he stepped to the telephone, Harry did not observe the door, because his back was toward it. When Harry started to phone Mann, the door opened a trifle farther.

Mann's office answered, but the voice was that of the broker's secretary, stating that Mr. Mann had stepped out but expected to return. She said she would have him call back, so Harry replied:

"Very well. Tell him that –"

The call ended right there. A big fist clamped itself so suddenly on Harry's throat that he couldn't gurgle. Another hand plucked the telephone from his grasp and clamped it on the stand, cutting off all contact with the outside world. Snatching at the fist that choked him, Harry wrenched it away, only to have the other hand come swooping over his shoulder.

FROM then on it was a fierce but short-lived struggle. Trained in trick jujitsu holds, Harry used every possible device to shake off his powerful attacker, but none sufficed. Harry did manage to wheel his antagonist around until they faced a mirror, where the man's reflection loomed like something from a nightmare. Over his own excited face, Harry saw an ugly, pock-marked visage, quite as formidable as the hands that insisted upon choking off Harry's breath. Sight of such a foe rallied Harry and he gave a long, forward pitch that carried the bulky man with him, but that surge for freedom led to Harry's own undoing.

As he landed on his knees, Harry instinctively shoved one hand forward to break his fall. That, in turn, enabled his enemy to relax one hand. From his pocket the big man snatched a cone-shaped object that he

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brought around and clamped on Harry's face. At the same moment the man relaxed his throat grip so that Harry could take a long, much needed breath.

To the odor of ether, mingled with the strong scent of flowers, Harry lapsed into a senseless condition. As he rolled to the floor, the cone followed him in the expert clutch of Dortha, who kept the object on Harry's face long enough to count to ten. Then Dortha arose, pocketed the cone and lifted Harry bodily.

From the way Dortha carried his senseless adversary to the window, it appeared that he intended to pitch Harry to the street as punishment for trying to ignore the orders of Dr. Marsh. Dortha's plan, however, was less violent and more subtle. He poked Harry's face into the outside air, let the helpless man inhale enough clear atmosphere to partially revive him. Then, taking Harry's arm, Dortha guided him from the room.

It was a most curious parade. Under the influence of the peculiarly impregnated ether, Harry became a human automaton. He walked mechanically, staring straight ahead, but his gait was firm. As they reached the elevator, Dortha spoke close to Harry's ear, repeating the same instructions given by Dr. Marsh, but including the fact that Harry had learned for himself; namely, when the next train left for Hilldale. Pressing the elevator button, Dortha strode to a stairway and descended, carrying Harry's suitcase.

Through his daze, Harry remembered what to do. He entered the elevator when it arrived and rode down to the lobby. Everything was blurred and misty, but his step was steady and his purpose set. Marching straight out to the street, Harry told the doorman that he wanted a cab. One was available, so he stepped into it. There, for the first time, Harry missed his footing because he couldn't see the cab step through the blur. The doorman caught him, slid him to the seat, where Harry muttered the words: "Grand Central."

THERE was a witness to this procedure, a person close enough to see it plainly, yet unable to reach the cab before it pulled away. That person was Margo Lane, who was parking her car in front of the Hotel Metrolite. Too far parked to swing out and follow the cab, Margo alighted from her roadster and asked the doorman where Harry had gone. Unfortunately the doorman hadn't heard Harry's mutter, so he suggested that Margo go in the hotel and inquire at the desk.

Following that advice, Margo found that Harry hadn't even stopped at the desk. Going to a phone booth, Margo called Mann's office and learned that he was still out, but that someone had called him a short while before, only to be cut off. Quite certain that something was really wrong, Margo took an elevator to Harry's floor. There she found his door open; entering, she recognized immediately that there had been a struggle. The bureau was out of place because Harry had gripped it while viewing Dortha's face in the mirror. Chairs had been shoved to corners and the open window was something of a clue, considering that the air was too chilly to require it. The connecting door, wide open, spoke of an invasion from the adjoining room, but there was a final clue that meant more to Margo than all the rest.

Throughout the room, despite the airing it had received, there still persisted the faint aroma of flowers, tinged with an odor that Margo recognized as ether!

Another person might not have detected that combination, but Margo's own experience with the subtle anesthetic was recent enough to jog her memory, if indeed she could have forgotten the overwhelming effects of her last meeting with Dortha. Definitely sensitive to the sickening fragrance, Margo could well appreciate Harry's present condition, though she wondered why Dortha had finally released him. While in that quandary, Margo saw the slip of paper that Harry had folded. Opening it, she read the notation of the train time.

Picking up the phone, Margo called Grand Central and asked about the next train to Hilldale. Its departure tallied with the time on Harry's slip. The train was due to leave within five minutes hence there wasn't any chance of reaching the terminal before it started. There was just one chance, as Margo saw it; that was to get

to Hilldale ahead of the local. She believed she could make it in her car, considering the train's slow schedule.

As she hurried down to the street, Margo Lane was impressed with something else. She was gaining the answer to another riddle that bothered her quite badly; in fact, it was the reason why she had come to the Hotel Metrolite to talk to Harry Vincent. For the past two days, Margo hadn't heard a word from Lamont Cranston. Even Commissioner Weston hadn't seen his friend, while both Rutledge Mann and Dr. Sayre had avoided the subject whenever Margo called them. Something curious was afoot, something that everyone seemed anxious to hide, and Margo had begun to believe that Lamont's best friends had allowed themselves to be duped into aiding a plot against him.

This trail to Hilldale answered the burning question. First Lamont Cranston, now Harry Vincent, had fallen into the power of Dr. Marsh; of that, Margo was certain. It was all so logical: Cranston sending word to Harry, the man he trusted most, only to have the call for assistance go astray and Harry with it. To argue this with Weston would be useless and Margo felt that the same applied to Mann and Sayre.

As she started her car away from the hotel, Margo remembered that Cranston had other friends who certainly would listen. Though they were not friends of long standing, they at least were linked in the common cause. Margo Lane was thinking in terms of Gordon Waycroft and his week-end guests: Kirk Brenshaw and the others who suspected the evil work of Dr. Marsh, even though they could not prove it.

There was no longer any doubt in Margo's mind. Dr. Marsh rated as worse than a man of negligence who let insane patients slip his toils to seek imaginary vengeance on relatives and friends who were actually concerned about their welfare. Marsh was a fiend in his own right, who deliberately let those killers loose and then covered their trails of crime. There was no other answer, though Marsh, of course, would deny it. The thing to do was learn the reason for Marsh's deep-dyed game and thereby ruin it. To overtake Harry was the first step; the next would be to contact Waycroft and arrange Cranston's rescue.

Perhaps Lamont was already past rescue. Margo fought off that fear by thinking in terms of Harry as she wheeled her car through heavy traffic toward the express highway that would take her to the open country. At least there was still a chance of saving Harry from his path of doom.

There was just one point that Margo overlooked. She, too, was taking such a path while The Shadow, the one friend who could really aid her, lay helpless in the toils of Dr. Marsh!

CHAPTER XVI

THE conductor shook Harry's shoulder and said: "Hilldale." Waking from a solid doze, Harry arose, picked up his bag, and started mechanically to the door of the railway coach as the train slackened for the station. Half a minute later, Harry was alighting on a darkened platform where the crisp air struck him with a jolt.

With a warning blare from its whistle, the locomotive chugged from the station, dragging its two cars across the highway crossing. Harry watched the mar lights fade around the bend, then looked across the single track. There he saw the station itself, a gloomy, deserted building, but there was no sign of the car promised by Dr. Marsh. So Harry stepped across the track and entered the station to wait. At the door, he paused to look back, impressed with the notion that he saw someone on the platform that he had just left. Charging that off to imagination, Harry sat on a bench inside the station and picked up his broken thoughts.

Recollections arranged themselves up to the point of Dortha's entry at the Metrolite. Harry remembered talking to Dr. Marsh; he recalled that he had tried to phone Rutledge Mann. Now he was at Hilldale, but something had happened in between; but hard as Harry groped, his mind couldn't account for the interim. There had been a mist, amid it a face, but all that seemed a dream. So Harry decided that he must have caught

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the Hilldale local and fallen into a peculiar slumber that he hadn't yet shaken off.

Mann should have called back; that much seemed certain. Trying to picture himself back in the hotel room, Harry was suddenly startled by the jangle of a telephone bell. Looking around, he saw that the sound came from a phone booth in the station. Since the ringing persisted, Harry decided to answer it, on the hope that Mann had learned where he had gone.

A smooth voice came over the wire inquiring for Mr. Vincent. Acknowledging his identity, Harry waited to hear more.

"My name is Cripp," said the speaker. "I am Dr. Marsh's chauffeur. There is some trouble with the car so you will have to walk up to Beaverwood. Just follow the road to the left and turn right after the first mile. We're very sorry, Mr. Vincent."

"Of course," said Harry. "Thank you for calling. I understand."

To prove that he understood, Harry returned to the bench, leaned back and lighted a cigarette. He smoked it to the finish, then decided he would light another to while away the time. As he struck a match, Harry heard an approving laugh from the doorway of the station. Coming to his feet, he met the bearded man who entered.

There wasn't a doubt that this was Dr. Uther Marsh. This man with canny eye and straight-lipped smile fitted Harry's expectations. When he spoke, Marsh used the same tone that Harry had heard across the telephone.

"My congratulations, Vincent," spoke Marsh. "I told you my order was final; that you were to wait here for my car, unless you heard from me to the contrary."

Harry nodded.

"You did hear from me through Cripp," continued Marsh, with a slight tilt of his head. "He told you to walk up to Beaverwood. Why didn't you?"

"Because Cripp might have been anybody," returned Harry. "You just spoke my answer for me, doctor. Your order was final unless you countermanded it, which you didn't."

"Why didn't you tell that to Cripp?"

"Because our business is confidential. Anyone who might pry into it could say that he was your chauffeur. So I gave him the brush-off. By the way, doctor, do you have a chauffeur named Cripp and was he the man who called?"

Marsh gave a nod, watching Harry closely all the while. Then in a sharp tone that carried a crisp crackle, Marsh declared:

"You tried to phone somebody in New York, to tell them you were coming here. That wasn't in our agreement."

"Of course it wasn't," returned Harry, "but you read my answer to your application sheet. I was very explicit on two points. I said that I objected to taking a job blindly and I admitted that I was not an honest man. Add those together and you have my answer. To protect myself I wanted certain friends to know where I had gone. Since I made no claim to honesty, I felt under no obligation to you."

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Dr. Marsh gave a hearty chuckle that Harry did not like, even though it resembled a tone of approval. Hooking a big cane over his left arm, Marsh clapped his right hand on Harry's shoulder.

"You are the right man for the job," declared Marsh. "You have shown yourself adaptable to circumstances. Come, we shall walk up to Beaverwood together."

They followed the road from the station until they reached the path that led up behind the ledge where Hapgood had met death a few nights before. Gripping Harry's arm, Marsh gave a gesture with his cane; then in an undertone the bearded man said:

"It is shorter by the path – and safer. That is why I came to meet you personally. I wanted to show you the right way back, provided you proved worthy."

Harry thought that over as they climbed the first stages of the path. Then, in a tone as frank as his companion's, he queried:

"And what if I'd come by the road as Cripp told me?"

The shrug that Marsh gave was visible in the moonlight that trickled through the trees.

"The risk would have been yours," he said. "Of course, I would have followed you and tried to keep you out of trouble, but it would be impossible to guarantee results. There is a plot against me, Vincent" – Marsh's eyes took on a vivid glitter in the moonlight – "and it is only right that I should turn the proof against the perpetrators."

"So you were going to use me as a guinea pig," chided Harry, "but when you found I might be more valuable, you changed your mind. Is that it, doctor?"

Marsh halted. Leaning on his cane, he faced Harry squarely. Perhaps the moonlight was unfair to Marsh, the way it gave his eyes a maddened glare, but to Harry, the bearded doctor certainly made a perfect picture of a complete fanatic. Nevertheless, Marsh kept his voice restrained and its steady tone proved him sane, at least to a degree.

"There was another question in the application," reminded Marsh. "I asked if certain ends could justify the means used to acquire them. Your answer was yes."

"I remember," nodded Harry, "but I did not include murder as one of those means to an end."

With his cane, Marsh gestured toward the far edge of the path.

"A man was killed below that ledge," stated Marsh. "I had nothing to do with his death; still if I could have captured the killer by letting murder take place, I would have done so."

"But why?" demanded Harry. "If the crime had not been done, there would have been no criminal."

"There you are wrong," Marsh declared. "These crimes are recurrent. They are all part of a very vicious plot, which has been going on for years. What is the life of one person, compared with the welfare of many? There is only one way to trap those who are behind this evil work; that is to trap them in the act."

"You spoke of one murderer," reminded Harry, "and now you are talking about several."

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Marsh gave a knowing nod; leaning forward, he gripped Harry's arm in a clutch of surprising strength. His glowing eyes took on a bulging aspect as he hissed:

"Those murderers are harbored by a monster named Waycroft, who has his headquarters at Gray Towers across the river from Beaverwood! For years, Waycroft has swindled innocent victims, stopping at nothing, not even murder!"

Harry gave a surprised look as though he had never heard of Gordon Waycroft. On sudden impulse, he inquired:

"Can you prove any of this, doctor?"

Marsh shook his head.

"Waycroft is too clever," he declared. "He came here purposely to extort money from me, on the assumption that anyone managing an institution like mine would be easy prey. When I refused to listen, he tried other methods. Right now he is working with persons whose relatives are in my care. Twice they have done indiscriminate murder in hope that it would be charged to someone at Beaverwood."

Drawing Harry along the path, Marsh stopped at another vantage spot and pointed with his cane. Between the trees, Harry saw a sharp curve in the road, where a high cliff reared on one side and a deep gully on the other. Full in the moonlight, the spot formed a clear panorama only a few hundred yards away.

"There is where crime will happen," predicted Marsh. "I know, because I have analyzed Waycroft's mental process. He learns everything, Waycroft does, therefore he must know that I am expecting you tonight. If you had walked along that road, death would have stalked you, Vincent, because you would make an excellent victim."

At that moment Harry was struck with the idea that death already stalked him. From close on the path came the tramp of a footstep crunching dried leaves. Wheeling suddenly, Harry saw a face etched in the moonlight against a framed space in the trees. One look at those pock-marked features jarred his memory. It was the face that Harry had seen in the hotel mirror!

"This is my servant, Dortha," introduced Marsh, blandly. "He came on the train with you, Vincent, to protect you. Even though I might have used you for a necessary experiment, I still had your welfare at heart."

Before Harry could reply, the rumble of a motor sounded from the road. A moment later, the headlights of a car whipped into sight, taking the very bend that Marsh had proclaimed as murder's lurking spot. If he'd really believed that Marsh meant all he said, Harry would have demanded some prompt action to prevent a tragedy. Even at that, little could have been done, for the car took the curve too quickly to be flagged.

The car was a roadster and in the moonlight Harry could see that its driver was a girl. A sudden fear gripped him that the girl might be Margo Lane, returning to these parts. Yes, it was Margo on her way to Gray Towers, a logical destination, considering that she had heard nothing from Cranston. Added to that was the chance that Margo had learned of Harry's sudden disappearance, which would account for her coming past the station and taking the dangerous valley road. Such thoughts flooded Harry's brain, only to dispel themselves when he realized that all his trepidation was based on the absurd notions voiced by Dr. Marsh.

"Keep watching, doctor," suggested Harry, blandly. "You'll see that nothing happens."

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Something did happen. As though struck by an invisible and gigantic hand, the cliff above the road was cleaved apart. As its whitish walls collapsed, the sound of a dull explosion arrived and the ground trembled beneath Harry's feet. But that was nothing compared with the scene on the road. As the highway quivered, Margo's car stopped with a shriek that drowned the girl's own. With a wild gesture, Margo looked upward to see the riven heights descending from the moon. Mercifully, the unleashed rock itself blotted out the moonlight, for all went black beneath the down-rushing avalanche.

Lost from sight, the car no longer had a chance in the few momentous seconds that remained before the coming crash. If Margo had tried to drive ahead, she would simply have gone into the midst of it. As it was, she and her car were just within the danger zone, yet too far advanced to return. Harry hoped wildly that Margo would manage to reverse the roadster, but she was evidently as petrified as the mammoth chunks of rock that were hurtling down to crush her.

The great mass struck. Stones flew apart as they hit the road and with them blackness seemed to break in patches. The full fury of the light that flickered through a huge, landslide roared onward into the gully, carrying all it encountered, Margo's car included. In the moon-rising cloud of dust, Harry saw the roadster turning over and over like a toy thing as it was hurled into the depths of the ravine. A few moments later, the rest of the shattered cliff was overtaking it, to bury it completely.

Dr. Marsh was right. Murder was in the air tonight and Harry Vincent had witnessed its progress. Crime had struck anew, despite The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVII

IN the hush that followed the echoes of the landslide, Harry Vincent was seized by a mingled urge. He wanted to find the men responsible for the destruction he had witnessed, but first he wanted to reach the spot where the car had gone, even though he knew that no victim could have survived beneath the crush of mighty rock.

Before he could start forward, Harry was restrained by Dr. Marsh, whose hand again demonstrated its powerful clamp.

"It's no use, Vincent," asserted Marsh. "The girl is dead. I assure you that I had no idea that the stroke would be so formidable. Otherwise I might have prevented it."

Angrily, Harry shook away from Marsh's clutch, only to be gripped by Dortha. Again, the big man took Harry from in back, pinning his arms so firmly that he couldn't budge. Bowing a polite acknowledgment to Dortha, Marsh produced a revolver and pointed it squarely at Harry.

"Calm yourself," said Marsh. "We have work to do. I would advise you to assist us, Vincent, if you really wish to place guilt where it belongs."

Those words proved effective, though Marsh may not have guessed at Harry's full reactions. What was going through Harry's mind was this: if murder had left a trail, Marsh would look for it to prove his case. It might be that Marsh would be covering his own tracks while attributing them to someone else, but in that case, Harry was confident that he could spot any deception. Craning his head from Dortha's grasp, Harry gave a nod and Marsh ordered the big man to release him.

Next, they were starting along the path which went well in back of the knob that had once been a cliff. All the while, Marsh wagged the gun as though in readiness for a murderer, but Harry was quite sure that it would turn his way if he showed further signs of rebellion.

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Before they reached the fence surrounding Beaverwood, Dr. Marsh changed course, cutting back toward the road. Sending Dortha ahead, Marsh stayed right behind Harry, explaining why they were taking the new direction.

"There's a path from the cliff," panted Marsh. "It runs into the private road that leads up to Beaverwood. Maybe we'll have a chance to intercept the murderers."

Dortha was stumbling through the underbrush, trying to find his way. Large rocks and little gullies soon slowed the process to a point that made it futile, but Marsh kept ordering Dortha ahead. At last they reached the path almost at the private road, only to find that all was quiet. The perpetrators of the blast were gone.

A few steps farther along. Dortha jumped as though he had met a rattlesnake. Pointing to the ground, he indicated a stick of whitish substance. Marsh stooped and picked it up to examine it in the moonlight as they reached the road.

"Dynamite," announced Marsh. "The brand we use, Dortha. We'd better not let the sheriff find it."

Looking toward Beaverwood, Marsh saw something else lying in the road. Leading the way, he stopped and picked up a length of fuse, another piece of discarded evidence. Turning to Harry, Marsh declared quite simply:

"You see what we're up against, Vincent. Always there are trails which would indicate that inmates are loose from my sanitarium. Come, we must look for more."

They found another at the big gate. Since Hapgood's death that gate had been chained and padlocked. The chain was broken, the padlock dangling from it. Marsh disposed of that incriminating evidence by simply handing the chain and lock to Dortha.

"Dispose of them," ordered Marsh. "We are not required to keep the gate locked. We do not have to say that these were here. Now stir up the gravel to dispose of any footprints."

Harry assisted in that task and followed Marsh into the Beaverwood grounds. As they neared the sprawling building, they were met by Cripp, who was carrying a flashlight. Apparently Cripp didn't notice Harry, for he began telling facts to Dr. Marsh.

"Hubert was loose again, doc," said Cripp. "How long, I don't know, because he won't say. We caught him out back near the dynamite shack. We asked him about the explosions, but he'll only talk to you, so he says."

"That is enough, Cripp," interposed Marsh. "When the sheriff comes here, I shall talk to him. By the way, this is our new man – Vincent. You can show him to his quarters while I hear what Hubert has to tell me."

Over at Gray Towers, Gordon Waycroft was seated in his study, talking to the sheriff. Occasionally sounds of voices came from the Italian garden and the sheriff seemed to be listening for them. Noting the sheriff's attitude, Waycroft remarked:

"It's only Kirk Brenshaw and his friends, sheriff. I told them to decide matters tonight. They don't know whether to keep their relatives at Beaverwood or –"

"I know," interrupted the sheriff, "and I can't blame them. They must be worried or you wouldn't have asked me to post two deputies down by your front driveway. I guess those nuts would come around from Beaverwood if old Marsh let them loose long enough. But I'm not listening to that talk in the garden; if I

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wanted to hear it, I'd go out there. I'm worried about that blast we just heard a while ago."

"More stumps, I suppose," said Waycroft. "After all, Marsh has the privilege of blasting on his own property."

"No longer he hasn't," retorted the sheriff. "I told him to lay off. There's been too much excitement hereabouts. And now –"

A pounding sounded at the study door. Rising from behind his ornamental desk, Waycroft pushed a light chair aside and answered the knock. The man who entered was one of the deputies from the driveway, a beefy fellow who spoke in an excited tone.

"Just got a report from down the road," announced the deputy. "Somebody blew the whole top off of Lookout Cliff. Maybe it was some of them crazy guys from Beaverwood."

Waycroft sprang to the window and called to his guests. A few moments later Kirk Brenshaw and the others came rushing in from the garden to hear the news. They, too, had attributed the blasting to a stump operation on the Beaverwood grounds. Hearing the real facts, they insisted that the sheriff investigate at once.

When the group arrived at the scene of crime, the moonlight showed them the devastation wrought by the toppled cliff. The road was still blocked with rock, but the vast portion of the landslide had continued into the ravine, forming a great heap that would require days to clear. There was no sign of a car, for the ill-fated roadster lay buried deep from sight. Nevertheless, the whole scene gave the impression of tragedy, enough so for the sheriff to decide upon a trip to Beaverwood. When he asked if anyone wanted to go along, Kirk Brenshaw volunteered. The others went back to Gray Towers with Waycroft.

FROM his chair behind the office desk, Dr. Marsh smiled in friendly style when Dortha ushered Kirk and the sheriff into the room. Cripp and Harry were there, also, but they were cued to let Marsh do the talking. The doctor expressed surprise when he learned of the damage down the road. Then, stroking his beard, he questioned:

"On your way up here, sheriff, did you find any evidence to indicate that the perpetrators of the outrage might have fled in this direction?"

The sheriff admitted that he hadn't, though he had stopped to search the path that led back from Lookout Cliff; but he added bluntly that the dynamite could have come from Beaverwood.

"It might have," agreed Marsh, "but it didn't. You are free to inspect our dynamite shack out by the beaver dam. You will find that it has a very strong lock and that none of the dynamite is missing. Here is a record of the last supply we purchased."

Marsh didn't add that he had just come from the shack where he had found that the lock, like the one on the front gate, was broken. Replacing a padlock was a simple matter and so was the changing of the record sheet that Marsh tendered to the sheriff. Maybe Kirk Brenshaw suspected such things, for he suggested something else.

"Suppose you bring my cousin here," said Kirk. "I'd like to talk to Hubert. Don't start that business about visiting hours; this is a special occasion."

Marsh dispatched Dortha to bring Hubert. When he arrived, Hubert proved to be in a calm mood, perhaps because he looked so sleepy. When Kirk asked him if he had broken loose this evening, Hubert gave his head

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a bewildered shake, as if such a thing could never happen.

"I am keeping my patients in close custody," assured Marsh. "One man became unreasonable today, so we put him in a strait jacket. Hubert knows that he can expect the same treatment if he disobeys my orders."

"Then you don't like it here, do you, Hubert?" queried Kirk. "How would you like it if I sent you somewhere else?"

"I like it here," returned Hubert, gruffly. "I want to stay at Beaverwood."

"And you will stay," added Marsh, "unless your cousin can prove that something is wrong here. You happen to be in my permanent custody, Hubert. As for you, Kirk" – Marsh continued his kindly tone – "I would advise you and your friends to stay away from Beaverwood. It is your presence that annoys my patients."

"I intend to stay away," snapped Kirk. "For your information, Dr. Marsh, Waycroft is closing Gray Towers. He says this neighborhood annoys him and I can't blame him."

The visitors were gone and Hubert was being taken to his room when Dr. Marsh lifted his hand from beneath the desk where it had been all along. As he laid a revolver on the desk, Marsh gave Harry one of his solemn smiles.

"Nice of you to maintain silence, Vincent," complimented Marsh. "Though I was ready for any eventuality, I was glad that nothing spoiled my interview with Kirk Brenshaw and his friend the sheriff. Perhaps our troubles are ended here at Beaverwood."

"They may have just begun," returned Harry. "When the sheriff digs away those rocks and finds a dead girl in that car, the crime will be listed as murder. I'm willing to side with you, if you can answer certain questions to my satisfaction. But if you can't –"

There was an interruption from the door, a sharp knock that Marsh apparently did not recognize, for he made a quick reach for the gun. Gesturing the weapon as he eased it behind the desk, Marsh ordered:

"Open the door, Vincent."

As Harry drew the door inward, a shape came lunging at him. For an instant he recoiled; then, realizing that the person was actually falling in his direction Harry made a grab. Dr. Marsh sprang up from the desk, staring in amazement as he saw Harry catch the form of a girl, who twisted so that her face came up into the light.

The girl wasn't dead; indeed, she was quite conscious, though somewhat bruised and very bewildered. If that pleased Dr. Marsh, it overwhelmed Harry Vincent. He recognized the girl was Margo Lane, who by every rule of reason should have been lying dead beneath the rock heap in the ravine below Lookout Cliff. What Harry knew for fact, Marsh must have reasoned on his own, for the doctor said with a dry chuckle:

"Apparently murder failed tonight. I shall summon the matron and have her take care of our new guest. This is very fortunate. Most fortunate indeed."

Whether Marsh was actually pleased remained a question in Harry's mind. If the answer were affirmative, it could mean that Marsh had become troubled at Harry's mention of the evidence to be revealed when the rock pile would be cleared away. After the matron arrived and took Margo to the women's wing. Harry noted that Marsh still seemed troubled by the mystery of the girl's arrival. Summoning Dortha, Marsh suggested that they visit the padded cell and told Harry to come along.

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The padded cell was on the top floor of one wing; the hall outside it slanted at the ceiling, because of the sloping roof. The door had no barred wicket, because its interior, like the walls, floor and ceiling, was thoroughly padded. Unlocking the door, Marsh took a long look at the figure that was lying on the floor. Harry recognized Cranston in the strait jacket, so worn out with his struggles that he was sound asleep.

"Let him stay that way tonight," decided Marsh. "It is the best treatment for a violent patient. We must take no chances with this case until I have diagnosed it more thoroughly."

As the door closed to leave him in solitary confinement, Lamont Cranston opened his eyes. His drawn lips relaxed and from them issued the whispered laugh of The Shadow!

CHAPTER XVIII

THREE days had passed, strange days for Harry Vincent. In those days he learned much, yet very little. For one thing, he talked with Margo Lane, who was recuperating from her ordeal. Harry found her in a wheel chair under a tree, and since they were alone, Margo could talk quite freely.

"It all happened so suddenly," Margo told Harry. "There must have been a hundred tons of rock coming right at me when something snatched me from the car. None of the stones struck me, but I hit the road real hard and everything went black. I wasn't hurt badly; they say I'll be all right by tomorrow, but I was certainly dazed."

"Too dazed to know who rescued you?" queried Harry.

"I could say that everything went black," replied Margo, with a knowing smile. "In fact, that's just what it did do, even before I landed clear of that avalanche, at least twenty feet in back of the car. And blackness means —"

"The Shadow," supplied Harry, "when he's able to get around. But do you know where he was at the time of your spectacular rescue? Look up there and see" — Harry pointed to the top floor of a Beaverwood wing — "that spot where there isn't any window. It happens to be a padded cell where our friend Cranston sleeps in a strait jacket every night."

Margo's eyes showed a horrified sparkle.

"How terrible!" she exclaimed. "Why, I was just beginning to trust Dr. Marsh. But if he's doing that to Lamont —"

"It's all right," interposed Harry. "The chief seems to expect it. During the daytime he's managed to slip me a few notes. He thinks that Marsh has connected him with Waycroft and therefore is keeping him out of circulation."

"Then it isn't all right," argued Margo, "because Waycroft couldn't have a thing to do with all this trouble, nor could his friends. I'll tell you why, Harry. There's no way they could get from Gray Towers to Beaverwood and back again, except by crossing the falls and that's so dangerous that only The Shadow would attempt it."

Harry nodded. In his pocket he had a slip of paper sent him by The Shadow. Just for emergency it had included a chart of the stone-strewn path across the brink of Indian Falls and Harry had spent half the afternoon studying that route at close range. Like Margo, Harry was sure that only The Shadow would attempt that crossing without first testing it. Certainly men like Kirk Brenshaw could not try it without long practice, which would be impossible at the Falls itself.

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"Don't worry about the chief," were Harry's parting words to Margo. "He's leaving it to us to handle matters for him. I may get to the bottom of this murder business very soon."

Later that same day, Harry was summoned to Marsh's office. Entering, he found Dortha and Cripp, which was encouraging, since he had come to know that they were the two men fully trusted by Marsh, which seemed to put Harry into the same category.

"About Waycroft," declared Dr. Marsh, solemnly. "He's plotting something, Vincent. We've been watching Gray Towers every night and the same thing always happens. Waycroft leaves his study; you can tell it when he turns off the light. From there he goes up to his room, turning lights on and off along the way."

"After that, he begins to flash signals, which can be seen over here. Dortha has reported them and so has Cripp. They come from one of the towers, just above Waycroft's room, only we haven't been able to decipher them. Tonight will be your turn to watch and the best spot is from the little pergola near the edge of the gorge, about a hundred yards south of the Falls."

On a sheet of paper, Marsh drew a floor plan of Waycroft's house. Evidently the doctor had called there, early in his acquaintance with Waycroft, for he described the furnishings of Gray Towers, to give Harry some estimate of Waycroft's wealth. All this tallied perfectly with descriptions that Harry had received from Margo.

Apparently Waycroft was a man of exquisite taste, for Marsh, like Margo, mentioned that all the tables, chairs, and even the pianos were of delicate construction and beautifully designed. But Marsh emphasized that point as an indictment against Waycroft, saying that any man who spent a fortune on furniture and tapestries would need to acquire money in the first place.

"Love of luxury can become a man's undoing," moralized Marsh. "Such is the story with Gordon Waycroft. When his attempts to blackmail me failed, he knew he was dealing with an honest man. That is how he gained the clue that enabled him to start his present game."

"I understand," nodded Harry. "Since you won't come through, Waycroft is trying to pin murder on you —"

"Not on me," interposed Marsh. "He wants to prove that my patients are criminally insane. In that attempt he is aided and abetted by Kirk Brenshaw and others who have relatives here."

"But what could they gain?"

"It is not what they could gain, Vincent. It is what they have already gained and wish to keep. For instance, you have seen Kirk's cousin Hubert. Would you class Hubert Brenshaw as insane?"

Wondering what Marsh was driving at, Harry decided to be tactful. He replied that in one meeting with Hubert, the man had impressed him as quite normal; however, Harry did not consider himself qualified to judge. That put the burden back on Marsh, who didn't seem to mind it.

"Your uncertainty is persuasive in itself," declared Marsh, in a pleased tone. "Except for a few temporary inhibitions which he allowed to escape his control, Hubert Brenshaw is as sane as you or I. The same applies to several other patients here at Beaverwood, specifically those whose relatives have been frequent guests at Gray Towers. What is the answer to all this? Read it for yourself."

Marsh slid a book across the desk. Its title was "Insanity in Its Incurable Phases" and the name of the author was Dr. Uther Marsh. With a chuckle at his own expense, Marsh added:

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"I wrote that book with a secret purpose. My idea was to impress wealthy men who had shipped unfortunate relatives to mental institutions in order to deprive them of their share in large fortunes, a practice which is more common than you suppose, Vincent. On the basis of my book, I opened Beaverwood as a place from which no patient would ever be known to return. As a result, I received the very sort of cases that I sought: men who were literally being persecuted into insanity.

"Somehow Waycroft learned my real purpose." Marsh narrowed his eyes until they flashed with anger. "He informed Kirk Brenshaw and similar rogues that they were endangering their own schemes in trusting me, which is about the only true thing Waycroft ever stated. With Waycroft as their leader, at his own price and terms, they have tried to discredit Beaverwood and mark its occupants as homicidal maniacs. Should I be convicted of criminal negligence, the inmates would be transferred to other institutions, branded for life."

Stepping from the desk, Marsh laid a friendly hand on Harry's arm, though in the grip Harry felt the same power that he had noticed before, a strength that made Marsh seem dangerous and formidable. In contrast, the doctor's tone was a smooth, convincing purr, as he guided Harry out through the front door and pointed him toward the pergola beside the gorge.

"You will help us, I am sure," said Marsh. "Watch Gray Towers and you will learn that what I say is true. I need more time to piece the evidence against Kirk Brenshaw and the rest, so that when I pronounce their relatives sane, I can expose the whole crooked game."

Alone at the pergola, Harry watched Gray Towers through the gathering dark. Marsh was right; the little summer house made an excellent observation spot, but that did not prove the truth of all the other statements made by the doctor. For a full hour, Harry waited for the gleam to appear in Waycroft's study, yet all the while Gray Towers grew darker and darker under the clouded sky, through which the moonlight, when it appeared, took on a speckly tinge.

Probably Waycroft was out in the Italian garden, perhaps in secret huddle with Kirk Brenshaw and the rest. As he felt himself making that assumption, Harry suddenly realized that perhaps he was being personally hoaxed by Dr. Marsh. Perhaps something was to happen in Beaverwood instead of Gray Towers; in that case, Harry was being decoyed to a useless vigil. At least there was one way to learn the truth, a way that appealed to Harry when he noted that the moonlight was struggling through the clouds.

Sneaking away from the pergola, Harry reached Indian Falls just as the moonlight gained a real brilliance. There, etched in the foam, Harry saw the stepping-stones as represented on The Shadow's chart. So pitiful did they appear that Harry would have hesitated, but for an approaching cloud that threatened to cut off the moonlight. Boldly, Harry stepped toward the roaring torrent and began the breath-taking journey.

The hazardous trip was over while Harry still fought mentally to ignore the gushing roar about him. As he started across the lawn to Gray Towers, the cloud darkened the moon, giving him the advantage of a hidden approach. Added to that, Harry gained another reward.

A light had appeared in the window of Waycroft's study exactly as Marsh claimed it did nightly!

Before Harry reached the house, the light went off. Another glimmer appeared from a hallway to be extinguished in its turn. Pausing, Harry watched the very phenomenon that Marsh had described. Lights turning off and on, Waycroft was going up to the room beneath the tower from which signal flashes had been reported!

Reaching the study window, Harry found it open and drew himself across the sill. Working from memory, he moved through the darkness, hoping to avoid all of Waycroft's fragile furniture. Miraculously lucky, Harry

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groped to the stairs without incident and crept up to the top. He was getting close to Waycroft's room when he heard footsteps coming down a ladder. Evidently Harry had missed the signals from the tower, but that did not matter. Reaching in his pocket, Harry drew an automatic to prepare for an encounter with Waycroft.

The man came past Harry in the dark. Oddly, he was going downstairs again, using darkness for the return trip. This promised something that Marsh had not guessed, so Harry waited until the creaks were at the bottom of the stairs. Carefully, he followed, anxious to learn where Waycroft went next; pausing, he heard the front door open. By then, Harry had crept down to the landing and was ready to begin a downward dash, when a great flood of moonlight suddenly came through the windows.

Instantly the front door slammed. Dashing down the stairs, Harry reached a window and looked out. He saw a man running down the driveway, looking back across his shoulder, but the fellow wasn't Waycroft. Harry recognized his bulky figure with its forward crouch and knew the face the moment that he saw it.

The man was Dortha!

On a new impulse, Harry wheeled and stared at the interior of Waycroft's mansion. He was in a great hallway that opened into the reception room and both, according to description, should have been thick with furniture. Instead, the entire floor was bare, without a vestige of Waycroft's lavish household possessions.

Back through the hallway and into Waycroft's study, Harry found the same barren scene. All furnishings – desk, chairs and tapestries – were gone from the study, along with everything else. What Kirk Brenshaw had predicted was true; Gordon Waycroft had moved from Gray Towers and his departure must have taken place the night before, if not earlier.

That, in turn, belied the statement that Dr. Marsh had made tonight. Clever of Marsh, to place his new man Vincent, where he could watch an empty mansion in which Dortha, Marsh's tool, could readily provide a by-play for Harry's special benefit. What they had not figured was that Harry could work his way across the river, right to Gray Towers itself.

To Harry, Dortha's hoax proved one thing. Crime was due tonight and though its purpose was obscure, Harry could tell on which side of the river it belonged and would occur. Beaverwood, not Gray Towers, was the goal that Harry Vincent wanted, there to deal with crime as best he could, while his chief, The Shadow, lay helpless!

CHAPTER XIX

THERE wasn't any use in investigating Gray Towers further. Harry needed to get back across the river while the moonlight still could guide him. It was fading again, that moonlight, under a single cloud that was the forerunner of a huge bank coming right behind it. Taking advantage first of darkness, Harry started across the lawn without pausing to follow the glistening walk that led to the Italian garden.

Harry wasn't interested in the marble statuary. Remembering Margo's account of how she had posed as part of the group, Harry recalled that at present she was an occupant of Beaverwood, the place that once had frightened her, but which Margo now regarded as a haven. Harry wanted to get back there before Margo learned that she'd been right the first time. He was thinking, too, of Cranston's plight, laced in a strait jacket for another night. That might prove a mild discomfort compared to Marsh's coming plans for Cranston and Margo.

Reaching the Falls just after the cloud had passed the moon, Harry lost no time in negotiating the brink. He had studied The Shadow's diagram backward and this time he didn't even notice the turbulent water that

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almost washed the tops of the oddly spaced stepping–stones. Gaining the other side, Harry kept to the shelter of the trees along the gorge until the moon darkened again. Veering toward the pergola, Harry reached it and resumed his place. Instead of watching Gray Towers, he kept a steady eye on the sprawling mass of Beaverwood, biding his time impatiently.

Nothing would happen until Dortha returned; on that point, Harry felt certain. It would take Dortha at least half an hour to come around by the road, so Harry resolved to wait unless he noted unexpected lights in the sanitarium. At last there was a crunch of gravel, telling that Dortha was coming up the driveway. Immediately a lantern appeared at the front door and came forward, to veer in Harry's direction.

Recognizing low voices as belonging to Marsh and Dortha, Harry stepped out to meet the pair. Lifting the lantern in Diogenes fashion, Marsh thrust his own face into the glow while he studied Harry's. Casually, Marsh asked if Harry had seen the lights go on and off at Gray Towers. When Harry nodded, Marsh wanted to know about the signals. Stumped only momentarily, Harry came back with a happy inspiration.

"I couldn't see them," he declared. "The moon came out all of a sudden and its glare dazzled me. I'm sure I saw some blinks, but they were very few."

"Extremely few," replied Marsh. "So few that there were none at all. Still, you were expecting some, so you imagined that you saw them. A very common form of delusion, Vincent, as I have learned in analyzing the human mind."

It was fortunate, Harry thought, to be dealing with a man so well versed in mental quirks. Nevertheless, it wouldn't do to play too dumb with Marsh. Putting himself a jump ahead, Harry asked how Marsh knew that there had been no signals. The reply that came completely nonplused Harry, for it exploded the accusations that were forming in his mind.

"There were no signals, Vincent," declared Marsh solemnly, "because Waycroft was not there. It may sound incredible, but he has left Gray Towers; lock, stock and baggage, if I may indulge in a mixed metaphor. You see, Vincent" – Marsh's eyes narrowed in their canniest style – "tonight I sent Dortha around by road to check closely on Gray Towers while you were watching from longer range. Finding no one there, Dortha went through the place, following Waycroft's usual route. He reports that Gray Towers has been vacated."

Had Marsh meant to tell the truth right from the start, or was he displaying a peculiar insight? Could he have guessed that Harry had somehow crossed the river and learned that Gray Towers was empty? Was he simply covering up for Dortha's sham on the assumption that the trick had failed?

Searching for an answer, Harry found one by its absence. That answer was Cripp, the only other man whom Marsh trusted. Cripp wasn't with the doctor, nor had he gone with Dortha. Perhaps Cripp had been assigned to watch Harry and had thereby learned of the latter's trip to Gray Towers!

While these thoughts roamed through Harry's mind, Dr. Marsh spoke again, earnestly pressing his opinions, whether genuine or not. His tone was sincere, but Harry could no longer see his face for Marsh had lowered the lantern.

"Dortha and I are going to look around," said Marsh. "Wait for us here, unless something suspicious occurs. In that case report to Cripp. He is in my office. We must keep check on the other attendants tonight. The patients are all right with one exception. He has been handled in the customary fashion."

That reference covered the case of Lamont Cranston, who at present was beginning another sojourn in the padded cell in the restraining embrace of a tightly strapped strait jacket. But Marsh and his hirelings – even

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including Harry Vincent – would have been quite amazed at Cranston's actions. Something more incredible than Waycroft's wholesale departure was taking place in the padded cell.

Rolling on the cushioned floor, Cranston was struggling with the jacket. Usually the occupants of such restraints fought stubbornly to spread their arms within the long sleeves that held them crossed. Cranston was acting more intelligently, working one arm upward to get it over his head. It wasn't easy, as was evident from the gyrations that carried the struggler all over the floor and against the wall, but the padded cell was helpful in speeding his escape.

At last Cranston's right arm went over and he relaxed with a tired smile to ease the strain that had almost wrenched his shoulder from its socket. Then, rolling about the floor, he maneuvered his left arm across his head so that the sleeves dangled down behind him. With what amounted to a back somersault, Cranston doubled himself through the loop formed by the long sleeves, which were linked by straps at the bottom.

There were no wrist holes in those sleeves, they were blind, like big mittens, but once he was seated with the sleeves in front of him, Cranston was able to work his fingers within the cloth and undo the various straps and lacings of the strait jacket. Free at last, he rose and stretched himself as though this were a usual routine, which it was. His escape from the strait jacket accounted for his split-second rescue of Margo Lane, the night when the falling cliff had overwhelmed her roadster.

Next came the question of an exit from the padded cell. Reaching along the wall, Cranston took a section of the thick, wide quilting and tugged it downward. The padding peeled from a stretch of slanted roof and revealed an old trapdoor that had once been a skylight. Dr. Marsh had evidently forgotten that old outlet after turning this room into a padded cell, but Cranston had remembered it from his trips along the roof.

To reach the trap, Cranston merely rolled the loosened padding into a huge bundle that reached his shoulder level. Climbing upon the roll, he worked the trapdoor open, drew himself through, and reached the roof. It was dark here, because of an adjacent gable toward which Cranston crawled. From beneath the eaves of the gable he drew the cloak and hat of The Shadow; he had cached them here to save time going back to his old room.

Once clad in his familiar garb, The Shadow became as invisible as night itself. Moonlight might have revealed him in the shape of a great beetle, as sprawly as the building over which he crawled. But there was no longer any moonlight. Darkness was so thick that it made a farce of the search that Marsh and Dortha were conducting, as indicated by the bobbing of a lantern here and there about the grounds.

Easing down behind the end of the wing, The Shadow heard whimpers from Bosco's kennel, occasionally amplified by growls. The big dog was not aware of The Shadow's presence, for the cloaked adventurer used this course nightly. Perhaps it was the lantern that annoyed Bosco. The Shadow did not wait to learn, moving off behind the building he kept listening for other sounds in the dark. When he was out of Bosco's earshot, The Shadow delivered a low, whispered laugh.

Out by the front door, Harry Vincent was stealing through the dark. He too, had heard Bosco's whimpers and considered them an excuse to report to Cripp. The sallow chauffeur was one man who might talk under due persuasion and Harry wanted to find out where Cripp had been this evening. Stealing into the building, Harry reached the office and gave a quick knock. Cripp's voice came nervously:

"Who is it?"

"Vincent," was Harry's reply. "Let me in. I have something important to tell you."

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The door opened promptly and Cripp stepped aside. As Harry entered, he stopped short and stared at Marsh's desk. A man was seated there, smiling very calmly; a gray-haired man, whose face was serious despite its upturned lines. With a thrust of his square jaw, the man pushed his hand across the desk, offering its clasp to Harry.

"I am Gordon Waycroft," the man declared. "Cripp has told me that you can be trusted. I came here to have a showdown with Dr. Marsh. Between the three of us, I am sure we can demand one."

Harry nodded and sat down. Not only Waycroft's attitude, but the mere fact of his presence here, promised to put new facts in line.

"Cripp has been working for me," explained Waycroft, frankly, "not as a spy, as Marsh would define him, but more as an investigator for my own protection. You see, Vincent, Marsh has a way of twisting facts about, as Cripp can tell you."

"Tonight was the first time old Marsh really talked," put in Cripp. "That stuff about a shake-down was the other way around. He's been working on Mr. Waycroft here, Marsh has, and trying to make trouble for such fellows as Kirk Brenshaw."

"By letting their insane relatives loose," added Waycroft, "to create disturbances in this vicinity. For example, Hubert Brenshaw is unquestionably a maniac who has sane periods. If Marsh pronounced him cured and put him back in circulation, Hubert would be a constant threat to Kirk. Marsh evidently thinks that Kirk would pay well to prevent such a misfortune."

The statement was logical in itself; the only thing that did not tally was the question of Marsh's policy. Hoping that Waycroft had the answer, Harry put the problem.

"Isn't Marsh overplaying it?" queried Harry. "Letting these madmen loose to commit murder? Look at the trouble it has caused him to cover up for them."

"But he has always succeeded," reminded Waycroft. "That is why his game is potent. Each new victim might have been a man like Hubert Brenshaw and that is what worried them. Add it for yourself, Vincent, and you will realize that murder could only have originated here at Beaverwood."

Slowly, Harry nodded. All trails had led to Beaverwood, even though they had been shortened. On every night of murder, Waycroft and his friends had been isolated at Gray Towers, at least at the time when crime was rampant. There lay the flaw in the claims advanced by Dr. Marsh: that Waycroft and such men as Kirk Brenshaw had played a hand in crime. They couldn't have; not with the Indian River a barrier between.

"I've moved from Gray Towers," declared Waycroft, "but Cripp thinks Dortha went around by the road tonight. Did you see any lights there, Vincent?"

"I saw Dortha," returned Harry. "I went over there myself. You've been lucky, Waycroft, you and your friends. If Marsh had studied those Falls the way I did, he could have sent his pet maniacs straight to Gray Towers. Here's how I crossed the Falls."

Harry unfolded The Shadow's chart and placed it on the desk, confident that it would impress Waycroft. An expression of amazement traced itself across Waycroft's face; totally intrigued, he failed to hear the light tapping that came from the office door. Cripp threw a worried look at Harry, who smiled as he recognized the knock. Opening the door, Harry admitted Margo Lane.

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The girl was evidently intending to leave Beaverwood, for she was fully dressed and carrying a small suitcase. Seeing Harry instead of Marsh, Margo gave a relieved sigh.

"This place has begun to frighten me," declared Margo. "The whining dog, people moving outside my window, and everything so dark –"

Peering past Harry, Margo was further relieved when she saw that the man at the desk was Waycroft, not Marsh. Advancing eagerly, Margo greeted Waycroft as another friend in need. With a welcoming smile, Waycroft arose and extended his hand; at the same time, he brushed Harry's chart aside. Looking down, Margo saw the diagram.

"Why, that's the path to your Italian garden!" exclaimed Margo. "I should say part of the path, the part I know by heart. Those are the stones that glisten and made me want to play hopscotch. That's not so silly as you think, because those stones attracted other people, too. Why, one night I saw Kirk Brenshaw –"

A savage snarl interrupted. It came from Gordon Waycroft, above the level of the one-shot pistol that he liked to carry. The gun was leveled straight at Margo, while at the same moment Harry felt the nudge of a revolver supplied by Cripp.

Crime's proof lay in plain view, supplied unwisely by Harry Vincent and corroborated unwittingly by Margo Lane. No longer could Gordon Waycroft cover the fact that he was the master mind behind the evil that reigned in Hilldale.

While The Shadow still was seeking to expose the guilt of Gordon Waycroft, the culprit himself had revealed his hand to Harry and Margo, the persons slated to be his next victims!

CHAPTER XX

No longer did Gordon Waycroft mask the evil that was in him. His game was as plain as the diagram on Marsh's desk, which in its turn was the only evidence needed. Every crime committed in the neighborhood of Hilldale, two murders and a third attempt, could have been traced to Gray Towers except for the supposed isolation of that lonely mansion.

Waycroft was a man who engineered murder and let others commit it. Dr. Marsh was right; Waycroft had made a deal with men like Kirk Brenshaw, who had railroaded their relatives to asylums from which Marsh had brought them, one by one, to Beaverwood. It was Waycroft who had learned that Marsh intended to help those unfortunates, and true to form, Waycroft had swung to the other side.

They had paid plenty, Kirk and others like him, for Waycroft's services in framing Dr. Marsh. They had done murder at Waycroft's order, all on the strength of the alibi that he had given them. Always, Waycroft was at home and invariably his friends appeared on call, either from his study or the garden, so soon after crime had happened that they could not possibly be blamed.

That was because they knew the short cut right through Beaverwood and across the supposedly impassable Falls. Long had they practiced on those glistening stones in Waycroft's garden, a replica of the seemingly impossible route that The Shadow had discovered on the torrential brink between Beaverwood and Gray Towers. That such thoughts were flooding the minds of his prospective victims, Waycroft recognized quite well.

"You are right," sneered Waycroft. "Kirk and his friends murdered the man in the truck and made it look like an insanity job. Where Dortha took the truck and the victim, I neither know nor care. Our second killing was

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better planned."

His eyes half closed, Waycroft reflected on the case of Hapgood, the murdered deputy.

"I sent Kirk ahead by the short route," declared Waycroft. "That was why the dog howled; it heard Kirk cutting through here. The sheriff thought that Kirk was in the coupe along with the others, the same coupe, by the way, that planted a fake detour sign the night before. Kirk waited by the ledge and after both cars left, he shoved the rock on Hapgood.

"Kirk's friends were waiting for him just around the next turn. He hurried after them and went along to the station. It should have been a perfect crime, for on the way down from Beaverwood, Kirk left a glove, a hat, and footprints from a pair of shoes, all belonging to his cousin Hubert. Unfortunately, Dortha heard the dog and followed in time to destroy the false trail. Blasting earth into that old hole beneath the fence was too ingenious for Dortha. I feel confident that Dr. Marsh suggested it."

Coming around from the desk, Waycroft still kept his gun muzzle trained on Margo. Tonight the girl was sure, indeed too sure, that Waycroft had lied about lacking ammunition for that weapon. Knowing that a false move would mean death, Margo stayed rigid.

"Kirk and the rest collaborated at Lookout Cliff," completed Waycroft. "Cripp told us that Vincent was coming, so we intended to make him the victim. When you drove along, Miss Lane, you made a suitable substitute. How you escaped, baffled me, but you will still make a very pretty victim, to go with Vincent.

"The sheriff believes that I have gone away. He is coming here shortly for a talk with Dr. Marsh. When he arrives, he will find murder on the premises, here in Marsh's own office. There will be no need to lay a trail tonight, nor do we care who is blamed: Marsh or his patients. Either will suffice, if we lay the scene properly."

Tilting his head, Waycroft listened. There were no sounds from Bosco's kennel; instead, Waycroft heard the noise of a distant motor which he recognized as the sheriff's rattletrap. Then came closer sounds, those of footsteps in the hallway; slow precise treads representing Dr. Marsh, heavy clumps indicating faithful Dortha.

"When the door opens, Cripp," undertoned Waycroft. "The shots first; then a rush for it. Dodge away from Dortha so that I can slug him; then we can both spill Marsh. I'll plant the guns and fix the setting while you are out front shouting bloody murder to the sheriff. I'll take the back way out, while you are bringing him here."

As he spoke, Waycroft was pushing Margo to one corner and motioning for Cripp to urge Harry to another. The footsteps had stopped outside the door; in another moment, the opening barrier would itself be the signal for death. Harry tensed for the last effort; in another moment, he hoped to be racing Cripp's shots in a mad endeavor to grab Waycroft's gun before the murderer fired it at Margo.

The moment was almost here. The knob of the door began its fatal twist. As it turned, the silence was shattered by a terrific crash.

Not the door, but the window, was opening in the fastest possible way. The whole pane was breaking inward accompanied by portions of the frame. In with the smash surged blackness, living and laughing as it came. Fierce blackness, its mirth sinister – The Shadow, hurling a last moment challenge to men of crime!

Even before that blackness changed to a cloaked shape, it disgorged a huge torrent of gray. Out from the very folds of The Shadow's cloak leaped Bosco, enlisted as an ally in this cause. As the great hound leaped ahead,

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The Shadow diverted his own drive and became his cloaked self in the light.

The Shadow's system was perfect. He sent Bosco at Cripp, who might have used his revolver to finish Harry, before turning to fight off another foe. Bosco's lunge was too long and powerful for Cripp to get in any preliminary trigger work. Bowled over by the great dog's rush, Cripp fired wildly at the ceiling. A moment later Harry was upon him, snatching his gun away.

As for The Shadow, he was taking Waycroft, but in different style. The moment he announced himself, The Shadow knew that the menace to Margo would be lifted. Waycroft's gun held but a single slug; he would therefore use his shot against The Shadow. True to form, Waycroft wheeled and stabbed his bullet toward the surge of blackness.

It was empty, that blackness.

With a sidelong fling, The Shadow was diving behind Marsh's desk, leaving only the background of the window, which Waycroft, in his haste, mistook for the cloaked shape that originally loomed toward him. With a drive, The Shadow sent the heavy desk straight at the man who held the smoking pistol and nearly bowled him against the wall. With a last-moment spring, Waycroft came across the desk, swinging his gun at The Shadow.

Out of rising blackness, a hand clutched Waycroft's wrist and twisted it. Howling as the gun fell from his fist, Waycroft wrenched away and started for the window, grabbing at one of Marsh's cumbersome machines to block The Shadow with it. The blockade served just long enough for Waycroft to dive to the ground outside.

The lights of the sheriff's arriving car showed Waycroft racing around the end of a building wing. Behind him came a cloaked pursuer, vaguely outlined in the glow, while farther back a great dog swung into sight, to join in the chase. A strange accompaniment to that scene was the sound of a dull explosion, much like a roar of distant thunder, off somewhere in back of Beaverwood.

More of Marsh's dynamite, no doubt, but the explosion for the present was a mystery. Unquestionably The Shadow had set it, for he had gone in that direction originally. However, the distant blast had no immediate bearing on the situation at hand.

Waycroft had reached the woods that skirted the narrow river just above Indian Falls. There, in response to Waycroft's yell, men sprang out with blazing revolvers. Kirk Brenshaw and his friends, awaiting Waycroft here, were trying blindly to stop the pursuers that they could not see. They might as well have fired at the thick clouds that were drifting from the moon. The Shadow and Bosco were not the sort to run into pot shots in the dark.

A fierce laugh chimed with an angry snarl as two figures tangled with four. The Shadow, a mass of living blackness; Bosco, a creature of mighty paws and teeth, were literally overwhelming the men beside the stream. Kirk Brenshaw and his friends had nerve enough to cross the treacherous stepping-stones that brought them to Beaverwood, but that was only through long practice. Waycroft hadn't educated them in close-range fighting.

Kirk's gun spoke and with it the fellow screamed. The Shadow had turned the weapon against its owner and now was snatching it from the murderer's loosening hand. A shriek from Sharrock ended with a gurgle that was drowned by a satisfied growl from Bosco as the big dog buried its fangs in the killer's throat. A sudden flood of moonlight showed The Shadow downing Brighton with a hard swing of the gun relinquished by Kirk. Old Abershaw, stumbling toward the river bank, sprawled with a wild shriek, thinking that both The Shadow and Bosco had overtaken him. A revolver jounced from Abershaw's hand and landed almost at the

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water's edge.

From the first of the steppingstones, Waycroft snatched the weapon and started across the brink. Halfway over, he paused where the course took a sharp turn. Coming full about, Waycroft aimed toward the Beaverwood bank, hoping to spot The Shadow in the moonlight. From among the trees came a fading laugh. The Shadow was gone and with him he had taken Bosco. Other men were coming through the trees to replace them; the sheriff and a squad of deputies.

Savagely, Waycroft laughed. With this fresh revolver, he could rout these newcomers and continue on to Gray Towers, where a car was hidden for escape. He had shipped his furniture by a back way that old Marsh had never guessed about and the same course would conceal his flight. None of the sheriff's men who might dodge Waycroft's bullets would dare to cross this brink.

The mere roar of the water would terrify them. That was the point of all Waycroft's instructions, the reason for the hours of practice that Kirk and the rest had been given on the garden path. To keep one's mind off the roar was all-important and it was accomplished by concentrating on the stepping-stones. Should it seem to gather force, that roar, as it was doing now, the trick was to gaze upstream and forget the Falls altogether.

To while away the few seconds before the stupid deputies became simple targets, Waycroft took a look upstream. In the moonlight, his face became as frozen as the rock on which he stood, as white as the foam that flecked close to his feet.

The increased roar was no product of Waycroft's imagination. It came from a great wall of water that was piling down Indian River, brimming clear above the banks, a tidal wave that bulked as high as Waycroft's head!

That blast a short while ago!

The Shadow had blown the beaver dam. All the contents of the two-acre pond had broken through to form a single billow. The great crest was gobbling the yardage with a speed that held Waycroft hypnotized. He, the man who delivered horror, was experiencing it to a degree that made him helpless. The precious seconds that Waycroft might have used were gone before his whirling mind could even count them.

From the bank, the sheriff and his men witnessed the end of Waycroft's ordeal. They saw the steppingstones as a clear path in the moonlight, for Waycroft's presence at the center of the brink was proof that the stony route was passable. The master of murder was personally demonstrating the fact that men could cross from Gray Towers to Beaverwood at will.

It was more a revelation than a demonstration, for Waycroft did not budge from the fatal spot. Like his crimes, the route that made them possible was a thing of the past. Like a monster of vengeance, a great hulk of water reared head-high and swallowed Waycroft as it swept him from the halfway pinnacle. Lost in the mighty mass, the man of murder accompanied its ground-quaking plunge as it roared down to the gorge below.

For minutes the river raged like a tremendous sea that disappeared into a rising mist so dense that the very treetops were dampened by the dew. As the tumult dwindled, Indian Falls began to shape into a semblance of its old self, but the brink was changed. The stones that had survived so many seasons were gone; the cataract toppled from a smoother ledge, completely buried by the foam.

The route to Gray Towers was closed, like the case against the man of murder who no longer dwelt there. Somewhere among the rocks of the great gorge, searchers might find a few traces of what once had been

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called Gordon Waycroft, but even that was doubtful.

As if carried by the moonlight, a weird tone arrived from somewhere in the distance, to mingle with the subsiding tumult of the waterfall. It was a peal of mirth, solemn as a knell, marking the departure of The Shadow, conqueror of crime. Murder's truth was known, its perpetrators dead or captured. Restitution was assured for Hubert Brenshaw and the other unfortunates whose cause had long been furthered by Dr. Uther Marsh.

Strange mirth that clung to the spot where Gordon Waycroft, master of murder, had perished.

The final triumph, like the last laugh, belonged to The Shadow!

THE END